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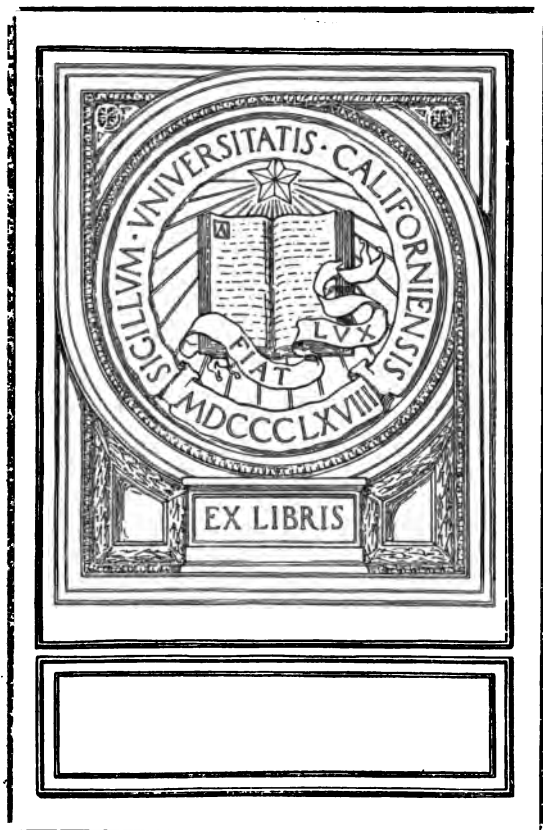
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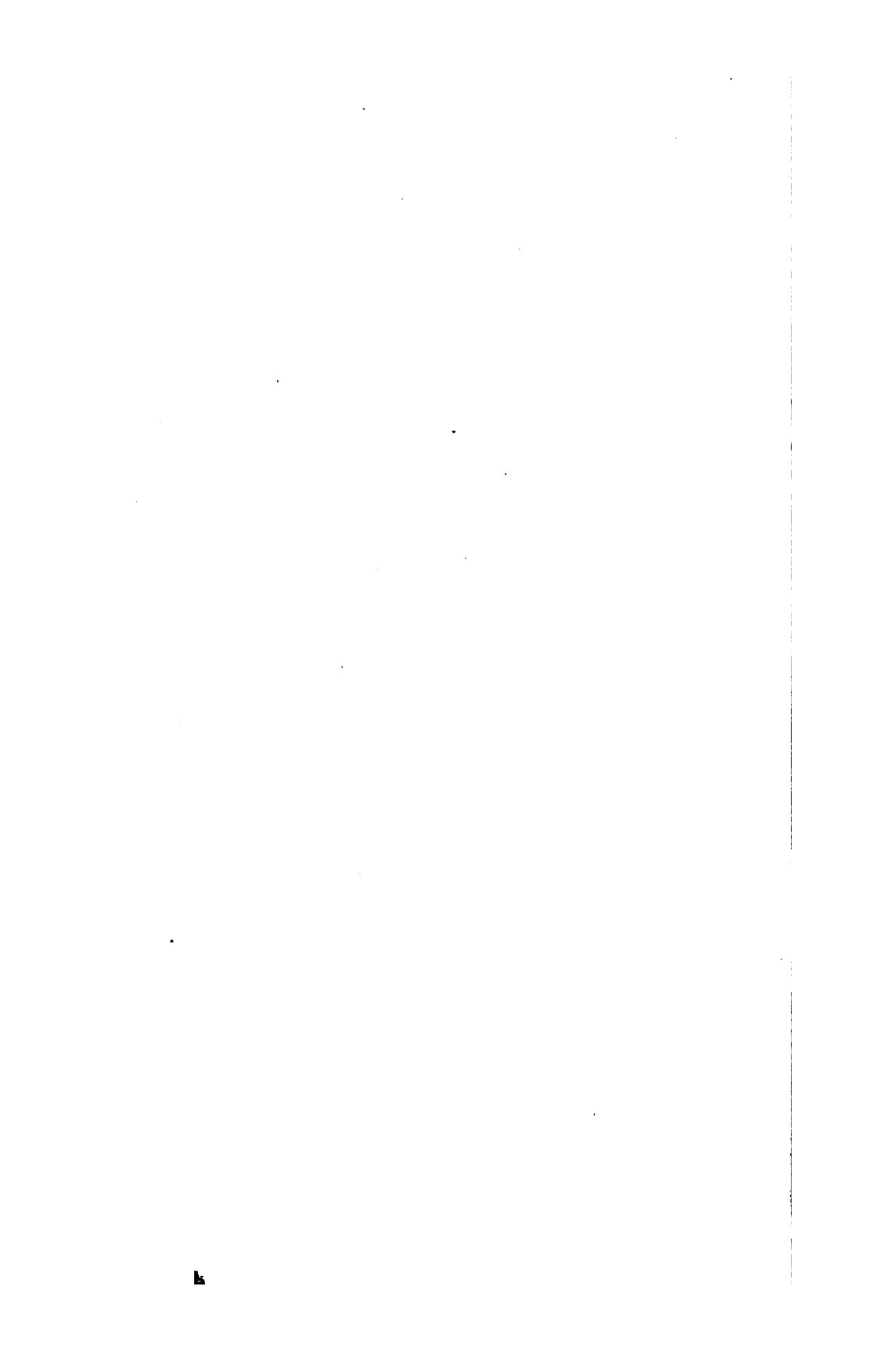
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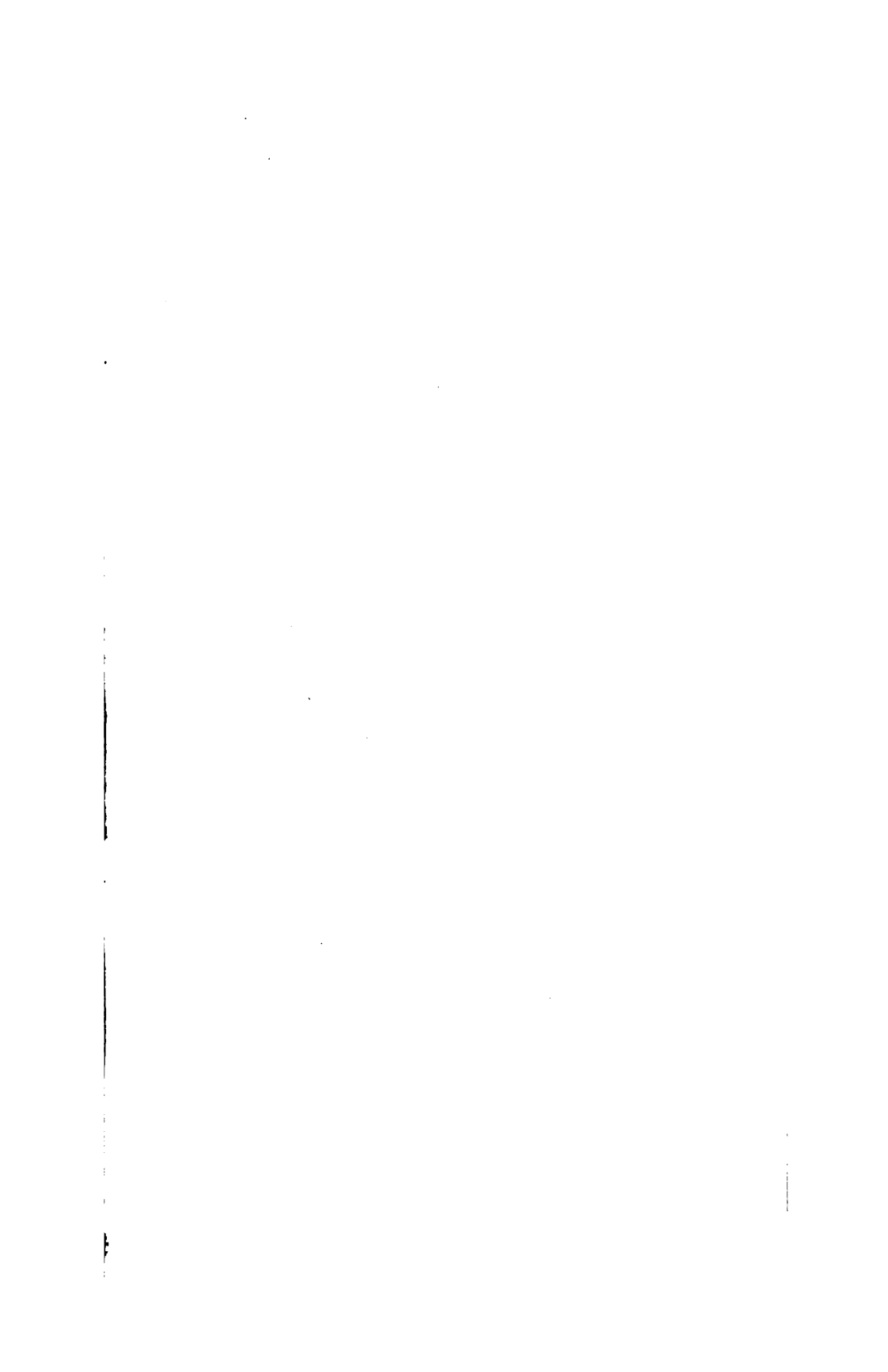
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AN
ENQUIRY
INTO THE
DIVINE MISSIONS
OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST,
AND
JESUS CHRIST;

SO FAR AS THEY CAN BE PROVED
FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR BIRTHS,
AND
THEIR CONNEXION WITH EACH OTHER.

To which are prefixed,
ARGUMENTS
IN PROOF OF THE AUTHENTICITY
OF THE NARRATIVES
OF THE BIRTHS OF JOHN AND JESUS,
CONTAINED IN THE TWO FIRST CHAPTERS OF THE
GOSPELS OF ST. MATTHEW AND ST. LUKE.

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PREBENDARY OF ST. PETER'S, WESTMINSTER.

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ARGUMENTS
IN PROOF OF
THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE NARRATIVES OF THE
EXTRAORDINARY CONCEPTION AND BIRTH OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST,
AND THE
MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION AND BIRTH OF
JESUS CHRIST;
CONTAINED IN THE TWO FIRST CHAPTERS OF THE
GOSPELS OF ST. MATTHEW AND ST. LUKE.

—
SECOND EDITION.
—

PREFACE.

WHEN the following Enquiry into the Divine Missions of JOHN THE BAPTIST, and JESUS CHRIST, was first submitted to the Public, it was not introduced by any arguments, intended to prove, that those Passages, from the contents of which it is deduced, are genuine parts of the Two Gospels in which they are found. Those Passages being not only of great length, but likewise in their contents extremely remarkable; and having been transmitted, from the first ages of Christianity, as certainly authentic; notwithstanding it was universally known to the Church at large, who transmitted them, that their contents were
re-

PREFACE.

garded as impossible, and therefore disbelieved, by some of the earliest Christian Sects; their authenticity was considered as necessarily included in that of their respective Gospels; and, therefore, as not standing in need of any separate proof.

BUT as there are persons who entertain a persuasion, that even these passages; so remarkable in themselves, and so peculiarly circumstanced; are in reality nothing better than spurious interpolations; and the very object of the Enquiry into the Divine Missions of Jesus, and the Baptist, is to shew, that the particulars recorded in these passages, considered by themselves alone, supply us with one complete, and independent proof of the Divine Character of Jesus, and the truth of the Christian Revelation; it cannot but be of service to the cause of Christianity in general; as well as
confirm

confirm the propriety, and promote the desired effect, of this Enquiry in particular ; to prefix to it a direct, and special proof, that those Narratives, on the contents of which it is founded, must certainly have been authentic parts of the two Gospels, in which they have been transmitted to us.

WHETHER the following Arguments, now first advanced in proof of this point, will be found sufficient to establish it, the event alone can determine. But as they are the result of the Author's endeavours to strike out, for himself, such lights upon the subject, as might give even abundant satisfaction to his own mind ; and he has not been able to discover any particular in which they are fallacious ; he submits to the consideration of others, what appears absolutely conclusive to himself.

AR-



ARGUMENTS, &c.

THE relations contained in the two first chapters of the Gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Luke, of a variety of miraculous events, there affirmed to have accompanied the conceptions, and births, of John the Baptist, and Jesus, must either,

FIRST, have been written by the two Evangelists respectively; of whose Gospels, as they have been transmitted to us, these relations form a part; Or,

SECONDLY, they must have been forged, by some persons unknown; and clandestinely inserted in the genuine Gospels of those Evangelists.

To form a satisfactory judgement, therefore, of the authenticity of these relations, the most direct, and decisive method will be, to enquire, Whether it is credible, that such forgeries, as those in question, could have been devised, and attempted; and further, supposing it possible for them to have been devised and attempted, Whether

it is credible, that they could have escaped a speedy and effectual detection.

IN the first place, therefore, is it credible, that the forgeries under consideration could have been devised and attempted?

I. It is obvious, that the very design, which must have been intended to be answered by them, could not have been formed by any one who had not embraced the faith in Jesus. And the only motive that can be suggested, as capable of having urged any believer in Jesus to so strange, and iniquitous a forgery, must be a supposed, over zealous desire to inculcate more exalted ideas of the nature of Jesus, than the genuine Gospels, as they were written, and delivered to the disciples, by the two Evangelists themselves, would afford any ground for entertaining.

Is it then, credible, that any believers in Jesus; and especially in that early age of Christianity, in which alone the forgeries in question must be supposed, if at all, to have been invented; that is, at the latest, within a few years after the death of the Apostle and Evangelist, St. John; could become animated with so extravagant, and at the same time so impious, a zeal; as to break through every moral, and religious, principle which Jesus had inculcated, by thus endeavouring to corrupt the

the Gospels; those very Gospels in which they must themselves have believed, and on the genuine contents of which they must have founded their own faith; for no other end, than to deceive their fellow Christians into the reception of more exalted ideas of the nature of Jesus, than the genuine, unadulterated, Gospels afforded any ground for entertaining? We may venture to affirm, that such a supposition, though it does not imply an absolute, natural impossibility, is however utterly incredible.

AND this utter incredibility of the forgeries in question, arising from their extreme impiety, will, if possible, be exceedingly heightened, if we add the consideration of the great number, and astonishing nature, of the particulars they contain; and that part of the two Gospels in which they are introduced. For, in the first place, we must be forced to believe, that the author, or authors, of these supposed forgeries, for no other end than to accomplish this wicked imposition upon their fellow Christians, actually invented all those miraculous particulars relating to the conceptions, and births, both of John the Baptist and Jesus, which are recorded in the first and second chapters of the Gospel of St. Matthew; and take up almost the whole first and second chapters of that of St. Luke. And, in the next place, we must

likewise believe, that they scrupled not to insert all these most astonishing particulars of their own inventing; no one of which could ever have been heard of till they invented, and inserted them; even in the very beginning of the two Gospels which they determined to corrupt; where it was absolutely impossible for so many miraculous events, of so singularly astonishing a nature, not to excite the particular notice of every one already acquainted with the genuine contents of those Gospels; that is, of every Christian; immediately upon perusing them, or hearing them read, after their insertion. When it is deliberately considered, that we cannot suppose the passages in question to have been surreptitiously added to the genuine Gospels, without admitting likewise such absolutely incredible suppositions as these; it must surely be acknowledged, that all ideas of the forgeries under consideration must be given up, and utterly exploded.

BESIDES, the passages themselves contain internal evidence, that they could not be forged. It cannot be believed, that any one who sat down to forge an interpolation of the Gospels, in order to exalt the divine character of Jesus, could in that interpolation apply to him any prophecy, which was sure to be interpreted by the Jews as foretelling that Jesus would conduct himself, with

with respect to a most striking, and important particular, in a manner directly opposite to that conduct, which the Gospels shewed he actually had observed. But if the narratives in question had been forged, this is what the authors of these forgeries must knowingly, and designedly have done. For in the Gospels it is recorded, that when, more than once, the Jews had endeavoured to excite Jesus to declare himself against, and to oppose the Roman power; he had shewn it to be his determined resolution, not to give occasion even to the smallest opposition to it*. But in the narratives under consideration, Zacharias is introduced, applying to Jesus, at the time of giving John his name, the prophecy, that he "would save the Jews from their enemies, and from the hand of all that hated them;" which prophecy, it was certain would be understood by the Jews as foretelling, that Jesus would rescue them from their state of subjection to the Romans. As the introduction of this particular prophecy could not, therefore, be the forgery of any one, who was desirous of exalting the character of Jesus; it is, in fact, an absolutely decisive internal proof, that the narratives in question could not be forged additions to the Gospels.

* Matthew xxii. 15—21. Mark xii. 13—17. Luke xx. 20—25. John vi. 15.

II. BUT, that in a concern of so great importance to the authenticity, and genuine contents of the Gospels, we may be properly aware of all the considerations which will unite in proving the absolute incredibility of the forgeries in question; let us, for the sake of enquiry, suppose it possible, notwithstanding all these insuperable difficulties, that some one, or more, most extravagant enthusiasts might conceive this incredible design; and actually proceed to the execution of it; by inventing all the particulars just referred to, and foisting them into some copy, or copies, of the Gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Luke, in the places where we now find them; and let us enquire, whether it would have been possible for these forgeries, so foisted in, to have escaped detection; and to have been transmitted to us as genuine parts of those Gospels, in the manner, in which they actually have been.

THIS question will admit of a satisfactory determination, by attending to some circumstances in the conduct of the Apostles, during the period, in which, by means of their preaching, the religion of the Gospel was first established in the world.

THE particulars recorded by St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, give us abundant reason to believe, that the Apostles in general, if not all the Apostles,

Apostles, continued to reside at Jerusalem, and in Judea; and to preach the Gospel, not only there, but likewise in the several countries round about; for the space of sixteen, or seventeen, years after the Ascension; that is, till after the council held by the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, upon the coming of Paul and Barnabas from Antioch, with a question for the decision of the Apostles, in the year 49, or 50*.

It appears likewise, that during this period Peter and John, in particular, among the Apostles; as well as some chosen disciples, such as Philip and Barnabas, who were not Apostles; made it their employment to preach the Gospel in Judea, Samaria, Galilee, Phenice, &c.; and that, wherever they established Congregations of believers, they appointed Elders to preside over them, for their constant regulation; and that they did not even then leave them to themselves, but from time to time went round to visit them; in order to correct whatever improprieties might have taken place among them; and to instruct, and confirm, them in the faith †.

It

* See Lardner's Works, Ed. 1788. Vol. VI. That is, the Supplement to the Credibility, &c. ch. vi. particularly from p. 67 to the end of the chapter.

† For these particulars, which cannot be given here in detail, see the Supplement to Lardner's Credibility, ch. vi. on the

IT further appears, that St. Paul; who, from being a violent persecutor of the Christian faith, was miraculously converted to it, about the year 36, or three years after the Ascension; and who, three years after his conversion, that is about the year 39, commenced the most indefatigable, as well as able preacher of it; came several times, in the course of the first seventeen years, to Jerusalem, upon the business of preaching the Gospel.* And that about nine years after the Ascension, that is about the year 42, Paul and Barnabas established a very considerable Christian Church at Antioch in Syria. That St. Paul likewise established churches in a great number of other places; and with unremitted diligence and care visited, from time to time, all the churches, or congregations, which he had established*.

FROM the same Acts of the Apostles it likewise appears, that very soon after the Ascension James, called the Just, was appointed Head, or Bishop, of the church at Jerusalem, and in Judea; and that, from the time of his being so appointed, he continued to reside at Jerusalem, superintending the Church; till at length, as is related by

time when the Apostles left Judea; ch. xviii., on St Peter; and ch. xvi. on James the Lord's Brother; in Vol. VI. of his Works.

* See Lardner's Supplement, ch. xi. on St. Paul; particularly from sect. 7. in Vol. VI. of his Works.

ancient

ancient authors, he was put to death in a tumult there, in the year 62; that is about twenty nine, or thirty, years after the Ascension*.

SUCH was the manner in which the Apostles proceeded in establishing the Gospel in Judea, and afterwards wherever they preached it. It is our business therefore to consider, what light these circumstances will throw upon the question before us; —Whether it is credible, that the particulars relating to the conceptions, and births, of John the Baptist, and Jesus, contained in the two first chapters of the Gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Luke, as we have them, could have been forged, and clandestinely added to them; and yet have been delivered down to us as genuine parts of those Gospels, as they actually have been?

III. NONE of the Gospels having any authoritative date affixed to them, either of the time when, or the place where, they were first delivered to the disciples by their respective Evangelists; and it not being certainly known, therefore, at what particular time, or place, either of them was first made public; a variety of opinions have almost unavoidably been embraced, by different writers, upon these particulars.

* See Lardner's Supplement, as before, ch. xvi. on James the Lord's Brother: Vol. VI. of his Works.

WITH respect to the country where St. Matthew wrote his Gospel, and first delivered it to the disciples, there has indeed been but one prevailing opinion. The universal tradition is, that he wrote it for the use of the Jewish converts in particular, if not at their request; though, at the same time, undoubtedly, for the use of all Christians in general; and that he delivered it to them, somewhere in, or near, Judea*.

WITH regard to the particular time at which St. Matthew made his Gospel public, there have been a great variety of opinions; founded upon the different circumstances which have happened to make the strongest impression upon different writers. One single author has supposed it to have been made public even so very early as about three years after the Ascension; some, about five; others, eight or nine; some, fifteen; and others still, about thirty years after that event; that is, about the years 63, 64, or 65†.

SUPPOSING, therefore, agreeably to the universal tradition, which there is not any reason what-

* See Lardner's Supplement, ch. v. sect. 2, 3. Vol. VI. of his Works.

† See these particulars treated at large in Lardner's Supplement, ch. v. on St. Matthew; Vol. VI. of his Works.—Michaelis's Introductory Lectures to the New Testament, English Translation of 1759, sect. 88.—Benson's History of the Planting of the Christian Religion, B. II. ch. iv. sect. 1.

ever to controvert; that this Apostle first delivered his Gospel to the Jewish disciples, somewhere in, or near, Judea; and at either of those different periods of time, which have been assigned for it; or even at any other time which can possibly be supposed; the point to be considered is, Whether it was possible for those particulars, relating to the conception, and birth of Jesus, which have been delivered down to us in the first and second chapters of it, to have been afterwards forged, and clandestinely added to it, without being almost immediately exploded?

At whatever place St. Matthew first made his Gospel known, it cannot be doubted, but that it must have been some considerable Congregation of believers to whom he first imparted it; and that he must have delivered it to the Elders; or presiding, and most respectable persons of the Congregation; not only in order that its authenticity, as well as its contents, might with indisputable authority be made known among them; but likewise, that it might be carefully preserved; for the continual, authentic instruction of the disciples, both there, and elsewhere. As little can it be questioned, whether all the disciples of that Congregation, to which it was delivered by the Apostle, would be eagerly disposed to read it, or hear it read; and that in consequence of this uni-

universal, and unavoidable desire, and the evident propriety of the thing itself, the Congregation, to whose keeping it was delivered by St. Matthew, would certainly agree upon having it read publicly; either at the times of their assembling together for religious worship, as it seems highly reasonable to suppose; or else, at meetings appointed for that particular purpose only; or, perhaps, even at both.

NOR can it be doubted, but that such of the disciples as were themselves able to copy it, or in circumstances to afford the expence of having it copied; which, as it was not a long work, could not be very great; would be no less desirous of taking, or procuring copies of it, for their own private use; under the control, and inspection, of those Elders, to whose immediate keeping the Original was committed; either by the Apostle himself, or those to whom he had delivered it.

AND further, we cannot but believe, that as soon as it became known to other Congregations; which it very soon would; that St. Matthew had delivered his Gospel to any particular Congregation of disciples; copies of it would be applied for, and by degrees procured, by at least every Christian Congregation round about; as well as by That at Jerusalem itself above all others; if it was not at Jerusalem that the Apostle first

first made it public; in order that it might be read in the same manner among them likewise; even before the copies could be so multiplied as to be permitted to come into private hands.

By these obvious means, as St. Matthew's Gospel was not a work of such length as to require a great time for transcribing, many authentic copies of it must, within a very few years, have come into the possession of the several Christian Congregations, which were in, and round about Judea; as well as, more especially, of That at Jerusalem itself; where, till the year 62, James the Just resided.

AND, as these copies, and more especially the Original itself, would certainly be kept with the greatest care; and the copies be universally read in their religious assemblies; as other copies gradually taken in the same manner, would likewise be in private families; the genuine contents of this Gospel must soon have become extremely well known to all Christians, in general, throughout Judea, and all the neighbouring countries; wherever the Apostles had already established; or by degrees came to establish, Christian Congregations.

THAT this must have been the case will be still further evident from other considerations. The early converts to Christianity were partly from
among

among the Jews, and partly from among the Gentiles. Such as had been Jews had always been accustomed to hear their own Scriptures read in their religious assemblies, as well as to read them diligently at home. As soon therefore as the Christian Church became possessed of any Christian Scriptures; and especially of any of those Gospels, which contained the very foundation of the faith, in the history of the words and actions of Jesus; all such of the disciples as had been Jews would most certainly be desirous of having them read publicly at their religious assemblies; as well as of obtaining copies of them for their own private perusal. And those converts who had been Gentiles; as well as the children of the first converts, whether Jews or Gentiles, who had been bred up in the Christian faith; would no less certainly be desirous of having the contents of the Gospels thus publicly, and privately, made known to all; on account of the self-evident utility of the practice.

BESIDES, if it were conceivable, that they could, of themselves, have neglected to cause their Christian Scriptures to be publicly read to all the members of their several Churches, we have proof, that this practice was enjoined them by St. Paul, and that they did in fact adopt it.

So

So early as the year 52; only nineteen years after the Ascension, and the first preaching of the Gospel by the Apostles; St. Paul, writing his first Epistle to the Thessalonians; which is supposed to have been the first written of all his epistles; closes it by saying, "I charge you, by the Lord, that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren*." And ten years after this, in his epistle to the Colossians, he speaks of their reading that epistle among them, as a thing of course, without giving them any direction to do it; and then directs them to cause it to be read to the church of the Laodiceans; and to take care to read themselves the Epistle which he had written from Laodicea †. And that the intention of St. Paul was similar with respect to his other epistles is evident from his manner of addressing them. The first to the Corinthians is addressed, "Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, —with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ ‡." The second, "Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth, with all the Saints which are in all Achaia§." That to the Galatians, "Unto the Churches of Galatia ||." That to the Romans, "To all that

* 1st Thessalonians v. 27.

† Colossians iv. 16.

‡ 1st Corinthians i. 2.

§ 2d Corinthians i. 1.

|| Galatians i. 2.

“ be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be
 “ faints *.” That to the Philippians, “ To all
 “ the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi,
 “ with the Bishops and Deacons †.” And though
 those to Timothy, and Titus, are addressed to them
 only; that to Philemon is addressed not only to
 him, but likewise, “ To the Church in his house ‡.”
 And from the Second Epistle of St. Peter, ad-
 dressed to all Christians, and written in the year
 64, it appears, that the contents of St. Paul’s
 Epistles were then become well known to all
 Christians in general §; and, consequently, that
 copies of them must by degrees have been tran-
 scribed for the use of all Christian Congregations;
 and that the various Churches must have adopted
 the custom of having these epistles read publicly;
 either at their stated meetings for religious worship,
 which is on every account in the highest degree
 probable; or at particular meetings held for this
 purpose only; or possibly at both.

AND when it is seen that the several Christian
 Congregations, in all places, certainly made it a
 practice to read St. Paul’s Epistles in this manner;
 as copies of them could be procured; no doubt
 can possibly be entertained, but that as soon as

* Romans i. 7.

† Philemon v. 2.

‡ Philippians i. 1.

§ 2d Peter iii. 16.

Either

Either of the Evangelists had presented any Congregation with the Original of his Gospel ; which was of a nature so much more necessary for, and so much better adapted to, the instruction of all, in the very grounds and reasons of the faith in Jesus, than any of the Epistles ; they would certainly cause copies of that Gospel to be transcribed for other Congregations ; as well as, by degrees, for private persons likewise ; and would all have them publicly read, in the same manner, as soon as they could be obtained.

THE necessity of this practice, in that early age of the Church, must have been so strongly felt, that it could not be omitted. For, as the Christians had not then any large buildings set apart for the purpose of religious worship ; but were obliged to meet at the private houses of some of the disciples, where but few could assemble together at one time ; and there must therefore have been several of these small Congregations in the larger cities, wherever the disciples were numerous ; till so many copies of the Gospels could be taken, that each Congregation might have one, either they must have been under the necessity of carrying the Original, or rather some copy, to the different houses of meeting ; that each Congregation might hear it read ; or else, all the different Congregations must have assembled, at different times, at

the same house, for that purpose; and the inconvenience, and even danger, attending both these expedients, and especially in the times of persecution, must have been so sensibly felt, that this circumstance alone must certainly have set the Christians to work, to cause copies to be transcribed, as fast as might be, for the use of all Congregations.

AND in addition to these considerations it is of importance to observe, that all those persons who were thus continually employed in transcribing the Gospels, must unavoidably have had the genuine contents of them so accurately impressed upon their minds, that no falsification of, or addition to them, of any considerable length, or at all striking in its particulars, could possibly have escaped their instantaneous detection.

SUCH then being the circumstances of the case, Was it possible for those particulars relating to the conception and birth of Jesus, which are recorded in the first and second chapters of the Gospel of St. Matthew, as it has been delivered down to us, to have been forged, and clandestinely added to any copies of it; and then to have been produced as genuine parts of that Gospel; without being immediately condemned as forgeries, and exploded; let this Gospel have been first made public by St. Matthew at whatever time, and place, it might?

IF

If St. Matthew first delivered it to the disciples either very early ; or at any time before the council held at Jerusalem, upon the deputation of Paul and Barnabas from Antioch, in the year 49, or 50 ; that is, at any time within sixteen, or seventeen years after the Ascension ; while the Apostles in general, as well as some other chosen disciples, were engaged in preaching the Gospel, not only at Jerusalem, but throughout Judea, and in the neighbouring countries ; any attempt to add the particulars in question, as they have been delivered down to us, must have been immediately detected ; not only because it must have been perfectly well known to all in general, that the facts so related were till then absolutely unheard of, and therefore certainly false ; as well as because the Original Gospel given to the disciples by St. Matthew himself, and many undoubtedly authentic copies of it, must have been extant, and well known, and would at once have proved the supposed addition to be a forgery ; but likewise, because some or other of the Apostles ; who were all at this time employed in preaching the Gospel throughout Judea, and in the countries round about it ; must very soon have been informed of these forged narrations, and appealed to upon them ; and would immediately have fought out, and condemned, the copies in which they were inserted ; and have made the most public declarations, that the particulars in

question were forged, and void of all foundation in truth.

AND whether the Gospel of St. Matthew was made public by the Apostle before, or after, the year 49, or 50 ; if the particulars in question were added to it at any time before the year 62 ; that is, not later than nine and twenty years after the Ascension ; the forgery must have been no less certainly detected ; not only because the greater number of authentic copies, which must have been taken in this longer interval ; as well as the Original itself, which must have been preserved to a much later time ; would indisputably have proved it a forgery ; but more especially, because James the Just ; who resided at Jerusalem, as Head, or Bishop, of the Church in Judea, till he was put to death there, in the year 62 ; must very soon have been informed of the remarkable addition in question, containing accounts of such astonishing miraculous transactions ; and would certainly, by his own authority, have condemned, in the most public and effectual manner, so flagitious a falsification ; as soon as the attempt to obtrude it upon the belief of the Church had come to his knowledge.

AND what, is it reasonable to believe, would have taken place ; if, agreeably to the most ancient testimony, and the judgment of some of the most respectable Writers *, St. Matthew did not make

* See Lardner's Supplement, ch. v. as before ; and b. i. ch. xiii. p. 511—513, of Vol. VI. of his Works.

his Gospel public till about the year 63, 64, or 65; that is, about thirty years after the Ascension; when James the Just, the first Bishop of the Christian Church in Judea, was now dead; and the Apostles in general were dispersed in other countries, and occupied in preaching the Gospel there?

IN this case it is evident, that the forgery in question could not possibly be attempted till many years after the year 64, or 65; the time at which we are now supposing St. Matthew to have made his genuine Gospel public; because if it had been attempted sooner, St. Matthew's Original Gospel, which must have been well known, and preserved many years, would immediately have refuted it. And during that number of years, the authentic Copies taken from the Original, in the more enlarged state of the Church at that later period, would have become so numerous, that no considerable, or remarkable forgery; and certainly none so very considerable, and so extremely remarkable, as that in question; introduced into a very few copies only; (and into a very few copies only could such a forgery be introduced;) could have escaped being detected, and exploded, by all those Christian Congregations, as well as individuals, under whose inspection any such supposed interpolated copies had come.

LET us put the case, that the experiment had actually been tried: let us suppose, for a moment, that the passages under consideration are not genuine; but were clandestinely added, no matter by what means, to some copy, or copies; and let us consider, what must have been the success of the attempt to get them received as genuine, either by those private Christians, or those Christian Congregations, to whose perusal the supposed interpolated copy, or copies, were in any artful manner submitted; and so, in process of time, by the Church at large.

COULD any Christian whatever have been brought to believe, upon perusing one of these supposed interpolated copies, that he had always before read in the Gospel of St. Matthew,—That “ Mary the Mother of Jesus had been found with “ child, before Joseph and She came together;”—if, when this Gospel was first made public by the Apostle, and till the very time when this interpolation was first inserted in some copies, no such fact had been mentioned in it? Or, that he had always read in it,—That “ an Angel of the “ Lord had appeared unto Joseph in a dream, “ saying, Joseph, thou Son of David, fear not “ to take unto thee Mary thy wife; for that “ which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost: “ and she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt “ call

“call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people
 “from their sins;”—if no such most astonishing,
 miraculous facts had till then been there related?
 Could any one have been brought to believe, that
 this Gospel had always informed him,—That “in
 “the days of Herod the King, there had come
 “Wise Men from the East to Jerusalem, saying,
 “Where is he that is born King of the Jews;
 “for we have seen his star in the East, and are
 “come to worship him?”—That on account of
 this application, “Herod assembled the Chief
 “Priests, and the Scribes of the people, and
 “demanded of them, where Christ should be
 “born!”—That in consequence of their deter-
 mining that Bethlehem was the place, Herod
 sent the Wise Men thither; and that there, by
 means of the same supernatural light which they
 had seen in the East, the Wise Men actually
 found him; and that Herod soon after caused all
 the infants in Bethlehem, and all its coasts, to be
 put to death; merely with a view to destroy him?
 —Was it even naturally possible for any one,
 upon reading such particulars as these, in any inter-
 polated copies of St. Matthew’s Gospel, to have
 become persuaded, that he had always read these
 particulars in that Gospel; when no such parti-
 culars had in fact been related in it, till the time
 when they were forged, and clandestinely added

to some very few copies of it? It is absolutely self-evident, that no person in his senses could be so deceived.

THERE was likewise another very important circumstance, by means of which any such attempt, as that in question, must inevitably have been exploded, if it had been tried at any time between the death of James the Just, in the year 62, and the year 100. The Apostle and Evangelist St. John lived to that period. Either therefore the forgery would immediately have been exploded, by the decisive testimony of the disciples where it was first brought forward; or else, those disciples who resisted the imposition would, no doubt, have sent a deputation to the Apostle John, with a copy of these interpolated passages; for his Apostolical determination upon them; and St. John would at once have pronounced them a forgery; by a judgment which even the very contrivers of the forgery could not have dared to controvert.

ALL ideas of the forgery in question must therefore be totally given up; or else, as a last resource, it must be contended, that it was not contrived and executed till after the death of the Apostle and Evangelist St. John. But to suppose, that accounts of such events as those in question could be invented, and added to the genuine Gospel

Gospel of St. Matthew, after the year 100; that is, at a period of no less than seventy years after the the faith in Jesus had been preached by all the Apostles; and full six and thirty years, at the least, after St. Matthew's Gospel had been made public by its author; and been read both publicly in the Christian Congregations, and privately in Christian families; as well as after a very great number of faithful copies must have been transcribed, by persons properly employed, from the uncorrupted Original; and further to imagine, that a forgery so exceedingly remarkable in itself, and so circumstanced, should not have been immediately exploded; nay, and even that it should have been received, and delivered down to us as an undoubtedly genuine part of the Gospel concerned; as it actually has been; would be a supposition so extravagantly absurd and incredible, as not to need refutation.

BESIDES; without having recourse either to the Original, or the authentic copies, of St. Matthew's Gospel; it must have been so obvious to the common sense of every one, That any facts of a most astonishing, and miraculous nature, and ascribing an immediate divine origin to Jesus; which no one of the Apostles had ever made mention of, from the time of their beginning to preach the Gospel even to their deaths; through a
period

period of no less than seventy years; must have been forged;—This must have been so obvious; that such a forged narration, added to St. Matthew's Gospel, at any such late period of time as after the death of the Apostle John, or indeed many years earlier, could not possibly have been permitted to gain the smallest degree of credit; or to have escaped the most determined, and immediate rejection.

IV. HAVING seen the impossibility of the success of the forgery in question, as it relates immediately to the Gospel of St. Matthew; we must now go on to enquire, whether it can be at all more credible with respect to that of St. Luke.

It is not certainly known at what particular time, or in what particular place, St. Luke made his Gospel public. It has been generally thought, that it was first published in Achaia; but by Some, either at Antioch, or in some part of Syria, or in Palestine*. And though Some have supposed it to have appeared about fifteen, and Some about two and twenty years after the Ascension; the more prevailing opinion is, that it was not delivered by the Evangelist to the disci-

* See Lardner's Supplement, ch. viii. sect. 6. p. 132, of Vol. VI. of his Works.—But see likewise Dr. Campbell's Preface to his Translation of St. Luke's Gospel, p. 178, 179.

ples till towards the year 64.; that is, about thirty years after that event*.

THE same kind of considerations, which have proved the utter incredibility of the forgeries in question in relation to the Gospel of St. Matthew, will no less strongly prove its utter incredibility with regard to that of St. Luke likewise.

No attempt to introduce a forgery of such a kind, so astonishing in its particulars, and so striking by its length, could be hazarded till many years after this Gospel had been made public; because the Original, given by Luke himself, which must have been preserved for many years, would immediately have refuted it. And when many years had elapsed, from its being made public for the general use of the disciples, so many copies of it must have been transcribed; as well for the purpose of being publicly read in the different Congregations, as for the private perusal of different families; that any forgeries inserted in a very few copies; (which was all that could possibly be done;) if they were of any considerable length, and contained any remarkable particulars, must have been taken notice of, as soon as they were made public, and effectually exploded.

* See Lardner's Supplement, ch. iv. sect. 4; and chap. viii. sect. 4. in Vol. VI. of his Works.

AND.

clandestinely inserted ; could no sooner have been brought out for inspection, in order to impose them on the credulity of the Christian world, than they would have been exploded by any one to whom they were shewn ; as a most unquestionable, as well as unparalleled falsification.

NOW is the particular place, and manner, in which these relations are introduced in the Gospel of St. Luke, much less incredible ; supposing them to have been forged, and clandestinely inserted ; than even the forgeries themselves. St. Luke's Gospel opens with the following introduction.—“ Forasmuch as many have taken in hand
 “ to set forth, in order, a declaration of those
 “ things, *which are most surely believed among us ;*
 “ *even as They delivered them unto us, which from*
 “ *the beginning were eye-witnesses, and Ministers of*
 “ *the Word ;* it seemed good to me also ; *having*
 “ *had perfect understanding of all things from the*
 “ *very first :* to write unto Thee, in order, Most
 “ Excellent Theophilus ; *that Thou mightest know*
 “ *the certainty of those things wherein thou hast*
 “ *been instructed.*”

THIS is evidently an express, and decisive declaration ; to the very person to whom St. Luke addresses his Gospel ; not that the history, with which he was going to present him, would contain any extraordinary, or miraculous events,
 which

which he had not heard of before ; but, on the contrary, that it would only give him a particular, and satisfactory account of all those important facts, *which had already been made known*, as well to him, as to all the disciples ; and *which had been constantly affirmed by the Apostles themselves, from their first beginning to preach the Gospel* ; and, in consequence of their affirmations, *firmly believed, from the very beginning, by all whom they had ever converted to the Christian faith.*

YET, if it be supposed, that the particulars in question, relative to the conceptions, and births, of John the Baptist, and Jesus, were not a genuine part of this Gospel ; the Authors of this supposed forgery must have chosen to insert all these most astonishing particulars of their own inventing ; which no one could have heard of till they were so inserted ; immediately after this very introduction ; which, in that case, must not only have given the lie, in the most direct and striking manner, to the whole interpolation ; but must have pointed it out so plainly for an interpolation, as to render it impossible for it to have escaped the notice of even the most dull, or inattentive reader. And this, certainly, we may venture to affirm, is utterly incredible.

So enormous, indeed, and extravagant, would such an interpolation as that in question have been,

been, that, in whatever part of St. Luke's Gospel it had been introduced, it must have been observed, and detected. But certainly, if it had been possible for any one to resolve to try the experiment of inserting it at all, he could never have chosen to do it immediately after that particular declaration of St. Luke, which must render the forgery more exceedingly striking, and conspicuous, than it would have been in any other place.

IN fact, if it had been possible for any one to have determined to make this interpolation, in this particular place; he must, at the same time, have determined to add to it another; by altering St. Luke's introduction, to suit it to his purpose; and making him inform Theophilus, that he should lay before him, not only a full and satisfactory account of all those particulars, relating to Jesus, which he had before heard; but likewise, several most important miraculous facts, which he had never before been informed of. And this single circumstance, therefore, that the particulars in question are placed immediately after such an introduction as they directly follow, is alone a decisive proof, that they must have been a genuine part of St. Luke's original Gospel; and that the facts which they contain must have been related by the Apostles, as occasion required, to
all

all the disciples they made, from the very time of their beginning to preach the Gospel.

V. BUT waving for a moment all these considerations, and supposing the forgeries in question to have been attempted, what must have been the consequence? No sooner could the contrivers of them have brought them forward, than they must have been exploded by all who were not concerned in the forgery of them; since no person could possibly give credit to relations so extremely remarkable as these, which no one of the Apostles could ever have made mention of; and for which no authority whatever could be pretended. And wherever the experiment had been tried; whether in Palestine, Syria, or Achaia; if notwithstanding their immediate rejection by those to whom they were proposed, they had still been contended for, as authentic, by those who contrived, and produced them; an account of them would certainly have been transmitted to Jerusalem, for the judgment of that Church upon them; and there they would certainly have been authoritatively condemned.

WHEN there arose a dispute among the disciples at Antioch, about the necessity of circumcision, they sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem, to have the point authoritatively decided by the

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Apostles there *. And in the same manner, no doubt, if St. Matthew's and St. Luke's Gospels were made public early enough to permit the forgeries in question to be attempted at any time during the life of James the Just; who presided over the Church in Judea for about thirty years after the Ascension; that is, till the year 62; to him, undoubtedly, an account of them would have been sent; if they were at all persisted in; and by him the falsehood of them would have been decisively declared.

AND if we should suppose the attempt not to have been made till after the death of James the Just, in the year 62; but before the death of the Apostle and Evangelist St. John, who lived to about the year 100; it cannot be doubted, but that as soon as these most astonishing, and before unheard of relations were made public, the Bishop, and other most considerable members of the Church at Jerusalem would have sent a deputation to St. John; with copies of the supposed interpolated parts of Matthew's and Luke's Gospels; for his Apostolical judgment upon their authenticity, and truth. And after St. John had authoritatively condemned them as surreptitious, and false; as he would, and must have done; it would have been utterly im-

* Acts of the Apostles, ch. xv.

possible for them to have been transmitted to us, as genuine parts of the Gospels concerned, in the manner they actually have been. On the contrary, either the very memory of these forgeries would have died away, and we should never have heard of them; or else St. John's apostolical condemnation of them would certainly have been transmitted to us, together with an account of the forgeries themselves.

OR if, for argument's sake, we put the supposition, that the contrivers of the supposed forgeries might still endeavour to keep up a party in their support; it cannot be questioned, but that the same heads of the Church at Jérusalem, who had applied to St. John for his judgment upon them, would immediately have informed him of the support still attempted to be given to them, even in opposition to the judgment he had pronounced against them; and that St. John would then have addressed an Epistle to all the Christian Churches, to prevent the possibility of their being misled by such an impious attempt. And certainly, That Epistle, written upon so very extraordinary an occasion, could not but have been delivered down to us; together with the three Epistles of his writing which we now have. And as, after this Epistle of St. John had been made public, no Christians, except the supposed supporters

of the forgeries, would either have added the passages in question to those copies of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, of which they were already possessed; or would have prefixed them to any copies of those Gospels, which might afterwards have been transcribed; the consequence must have been, that it would have been only not absolutely impossible for so much as even a single copy of those Gospels, to which the forgeries were added, to have come down to us; and we should not have known what the contents of these forgeries were; except from the Epistle of St. John written purposely to condemn them; and whatever the early Christian Writers might have mentioned concerning them. Whereas the actual fact is, that no such Epistle was ever written by St. John; and all the copies of the Gospels concerned, which have been transmitted to us; except those, the beginnings of which are manifestly lost; are found to contain the passages in question*.

VI. If then the forgeries in question should be still conceived possible, it can only be by supposing them to have taken place at some time

* See Dr. Campbell's Note on Matt. ii. 23: Vol. II. p. 308, of his Translation of the Gospels. "It is proper to observe," &c.

after

after the death of the Apostle John ; when there was no longer any person living, who could on his own apostolical authority condemn them. But supposing even this to have been the case, what must have been the issue ?

THE latest time assigned for the publication of St. Matthew's and St. Luke's Gospels is about the year 63, 64, or 65 * ; and the Apostle and Evangelist St. John lived to about the year 100 ; that is, about five, or six, and thirty years after this latest time of their publication. During this interval of five, or six, and thirty years ; and especially in that advanced state of the Church, near the beginning of the Second Century ; very many copies of Matthew's and Luke's Gospels must have been transcribed, and carefully kept ; not only for private perusal, but, more especially, to be read at the religious meetings of the disciples. Several years, therefore, before the death of the Apostle and Evangelist St. John, the genuine contents of these Gospels must have been so perfectly well known ; and there must have been so many copies of them, whose completeness, as well as authenticity, would not admit of doubt ; and so many persons who knew that to be the case ; that if any one could have been wild enough to invent

* See the authorities referred to in the note in page 27.

- the passages in question, and foist them into any copies of the Gospels concerned, which he could get into his possession; after the death of the Apostle John; and then bring those copies into public notice; and submit them to public inspection as unadulterated; and therefore, as the only authentic, and complete copies of these Gospels; it would have been absolutely impossible, but that such impudent forgeries must have been immediately exploded; and the interpolations themselves could not have been delivered down to us, as they actually have been, as genuine parts of the Gospels in which they are found.

BESIDES, at whatever time, whether early or late, after the death of the Apostle John, we may suppose the attempt to have been made, to pass the narrations in question for genuine upon the Christian world; the particulars related in them must have been absolutely unheard of till that very time, by all except the few who were concerned in forging them; and no one copy of the Gospels concerned could at that time have been found to contain them; except those very few, into which the contrivers of the supposed forgeries had been able to foist them.

WHAT then must have been the case, as soon as the attempt to pass them upon the disciples in general was brought forward; wherever it may
be

be supposed to have been made? Christians, by being either converted to the Christian faith, or educated in it, did not become destitute of common sense; and they must therefore have acted, upon this very particular occasion, as persons who were possessed of common sense certainly would have acted. If the copies, to which the supposed forged narrations were added, were in private hands, the persons to whom they were directly shewn, or to whose notice they were in any artful manner submitted, in order to get these astonishing additions received, would immediately have compared them, not only with other copies in private hands likewise; but especially with those copies, which were read in their religious meetings, at those places, where the supposed corrupted copies were brought into notice.—Or if the forgers could have found means to corrupt some copy, or even more than one copy, made use of at their religious meetings; the presiding, and most intelligent members of those Congregations to which these copies belonged, as soon as they came to hear these before unheard of, and astonishing relations read among them, at their religious meetings, would certainly have looked for them in their own private copies, as well as in the private copies of all to whom they had access; and would likewise have enquired, whether these, till then unheard

unheard of, narrations were to be found in the copies made use of in other Congregations, as well as their own. And as the number of copies, which the contrivers of the supposed forgeries could have found means to corrupt, must have been very small; and every other copy, without exception, would have borne testimony against them; while every person not concerned in the supposed forgeries must have known with absolute certainty, that he had never seen, or heard of, any such relations as those in question, till the time when the forgers of them produced them into notice; the attempt to support these forgeries must either have been immediately given up, and the forgeries themselves have been totally rejected; or else, if the persons who forged them, and such as they might have gained over to their party, (if indeed they could have gained any;) continued obstinately to contend for them as genuine; and to use those copies into which these narrations had been foisted, as the only complete copies of the two Gospels concerned;—If this, merely for the sake of argument, be supposed not absolutely impossible; then This Party must immediately have become noticed as a Small New Sect of Christians; who distinguished themselves from the great body of the Christian Church, by the peculiarity of receiving

ceiving the passages in question as genuine, while every one else rejected them as forged.

THIS must at all events have proved the case. And this circumstance will furnish us with another satisfactory proof, that it is absolutely impossible for the supposed forgeries to have been contrived, and executed, at any time after the death of the Apostle John.

IF the attempt supposed had been made after the death of John; who lived to the end of the first century; there must have been a time, after the beginning of the Second Century, when the particulars in question, contained in the two first chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, as we have them, first began to be heard of.—There must have been a time, after the beginning of the Second Century, when they who received these passages as genuine, first became known, as a Small New Sect of Christians; distinguishing themselves from all other Christians by that very peculiarity; and when the whole Christian Church, except this very Small New Sect, universally rejected these passages as notorious interpolations. And since all the unmutated copies of the two Gospels concerned, which have come down to us, contain the passages in question; there must likewise have been, at some period still later in the Second Century, a far
more

more remarkable epocha still ;—a time, when the great body of Christians, in all places, must have come over to the distinguishing peculiarity of this Small New Sect ; and when, agreeing to receive the passages in question as genuine, they must actually, and by concert, have corrupted all their authentic copies of the two Gospels concerned ; by prefixing universally these passages to them, as original parts of them.

AND if the Christian Church produced any Writers upon the affairs of the Church, at, or not very long after, that time ; those Writers must inevitably have recorded these astonishing events ; to which there is nothing similar in the history of mankind. Whether they could have given a satisfactory account of the means by which so unparalleled a revolution was brought about, or not ; they would, at all events, have recorded the revolution itself ; and we should have been explicitly informed by them ;—That during a long period the Gospels of Matthew and Luke were not known to have contained those passages relating to the conceptions and births, of John the Baptist, and Jesus ; which, at the time when they wrote, were universally placed at the beginning of them :—That the Christian Church had possessed those Gospels without the passages concerned, till such a certain period in the early
part

part of the Second Century: but that not long before that time, a New Sect of Christians had sprung up; who then produced some copy, or copies, of those Gospels, containing the passages in question; and contended, that they had been originally contained in them; by what means forever it had happened, that they had been left out of all the copies, except those which they had produced containing them.—That at length, this New Sect found means to persuade the whole Christian Church to adopt this belief; and that then, accordingly, the copies of these Gospels were all by degrees altered, and the passages in question inserted in them, as they have been delivered down from them to us,

SUCH must have been the history of these marvellous events, which the Christian Writers, who flourished but a very few years after they must have taken place, would certainly have given us; if the passages in question had been forged, and added to their respective Gospels, at any time after the death of the Apostle, and Evangelist, St. John.

BUT so far is this from being the case, that the history of the Church is an absolute, and direct contradiction to every idea of this kind; and proves all such suppositions to be as false in fact, as they are, in their very nature, absurd and impossible.

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THE Christian Writers, who flourished not long after the death of the Apostle John, do not suggest any such notion, as that there ever was a time; either after the death of John, or before it; when the Gospels of Matthew, and Luke, did not contain those passages relating to the conceptions, and births, of John the Baptist and Jesus, which they now do contain. They give not the least hint of any time, at which the Christian Church, from having the Gospels of Matthew and Luke without these passages, were first made acquainted with them; and, from being prevailed on to consider them as genuine, agreed to admit them; and accordingly added them to all the copies of these Gospels; of none of which they had before made a part.

BUT, in direct contradiction to every such idea, they explicitly shew, that very early in the Second Century, not long after the death of the Apostle John, there was indeed grown up into public notice a New-Sect of Christians, known by the name of Ebionites; who (in agreement with a somewhat earlier sect, the Cerinthians,) differed from the Church at large, with respect to the Miraculous Conception of Jesus, recorded in the passages in question: but that this Sect, instead of being the first publishers, and defenders, of these passages; and the first to persuade the Church

Church at large to receive them, and add them to the two Gospels concerned; were actually distinguished as a Sect, opposed to the Catholic Church, by disbelieving the particulars recorded in these passages, and therefore rejecting them; while the Church at large continued to receive them, as undoubted parts of their respective Gospels, known to be so, from the very time when those Gospels were first delivered to the disciples, by the Evangelists who wrote them*.

THEY mention likewise an important particular in the conduct of this Sect; which may serve to shew, that their disbelief of the miraculous Conception of Jesus ought not to be regarded as a circumstance of any moment, in judging of the authenticity of those passages in the Gospels, in which the particulars relating to it are recorded. They shew, that this Sect, on account of the strong dislike they entertained to the doctrine of

* See Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History, 1st Century, p. 2, ch. v. sect. 17; and 2d Century, p. 2, ch. v. sect. 3. That one branch of the Ebionites denied the miraculous Conception, see the passages from Eusebius, quoted by Lardner, Vol. II. of his Works, p. 307; and Vol. VII. p. 20; and particularly Vol. III. p. 541, note H.—Of the beginning of the Gospel of the Ebionites, see the reference to Epiphanius, Lardner's Works, Vol. II. p. 143; that is, Credibility, p. 2, ch. xiv. N° II.

the abolition of the Jewish Law by the Gospel; which was very particularly insisted on by St. Paul; rejected entirely both St. Paul himself, and his Epistles*. From which fact alone it is abundantly evident, that their disbelief of the miraculous Conception of Jesus cannot afford even the smallest presumption against the authenticity of those passages, of the first and second chapters of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, in which the particulars of it are recorded.

AND they shew further, that though his Sect persisted in disbelieving the contents of these passages; the Church at large were not, even in the smallest degree, influenced by their conduct, to disbelieve them likewise; but continued to receive them; as it is evident from these facts they must have done from the beginning; and, accordingly, delivered them down to us, as of the same unquestionable authority with any other passage which those Gospels contain.

HAVING now seen, in the first place, that the Narratives in question are in themselves of such a nature, as to render it absolutely incredible,

* That the Ebionites rejected St. Paul, and his Epistles, see Lardner's Works, Vol. II. p. 354; That is, Credibility, p. 2, ch. xxix. sect. iv. 20; and the quotation from Eusebius in Vol. VII. p. 20.—And Marsh's Translation of Michaelis's Introduction to the New Test. Vol. I. p. 36, 37.

that

that they could be invented, and forged, by any persons whatever;—In the next, that if they could have been forged, they could not have been made public at any period of time, either during the life, or after the death, of the Apostle and Evangelist St. John, without being inevitably exploded;—And further, that even if they could have been forged; and matters could have been so managed by those who forged them, as to procure their reception by the Church at large, as genuine passages of the two Gospels concerned; the history of the Church relating to them must then have been diametrically opposite to what it actually is;—Having seen all this, we might here rest the question; as having abundantly proved, that the narratives under consideration, relating to the births of Jesus and the Baptist, must have been authentic passages of their respective Gospels.

BUT because some of the earliest Christian Sects disbelieved the contents of these relations; and that circumstance has probably been the radical cause of whatever doubts about them, or actual disbelief of them, may at this day be entertained; it will certainly be useful, to shew, further, that their authenticity is very satisfactorily confirmed, not only by an early Writer of the Church at large, who, with the Church, held their authority

urity to be beyond all doubt; but even by those very Sects, who did not believe their contents, and rejected them; as well as by the most distinguished of those professed Enemies to the faith in Jesus, who exerted all their abilities to overthrow it.

VII. AND that these passages were certainly authentic; as the Church at large, without the smallest doubt, held them to be; the manner in which they are mentioned in the writings of Justin Martyr, the first Apologist for Christianity, will afford us very satisfactory corroborating proof.

JUSTIN wrote, and presented his First Apology, at the latest within fifty years after the death of the Apostle John *. In it he repeatedly insists upon the fact, that Jesus was born of a Virgin; which, he likewise contends, it was foretold by Isaiah, that Jesus should be; and for the truth of this fact he refers to the particulars recorded in the passages in question; and expressly affirms, that these passages were written by the same Evangelists who had written the whole history of Jesus; and without judging it requisite to say a syllable

* Cave's Life of Justin, sect. 8.—Lardner's Works, Vol. II. p. 117; that is, Credibility, p. 2, ch. x.—Justin's First Apology, N° 46, p. 71. Ed. Paris, 1742.

in support of the truth of this assertion *. This is what he could not have done, if any doubts of the authenticity of these passages had been at that time entertained; or if the Sects, who disbelieved the particulars related in them, had attempted to produce any evidence, by which their authenticity could be brought into question.

JUSTIN'S Apology was addressed to the Emperor, the Senate, and the people of Rome; and was written, and presented, for the very purpose of exciting in the Emperor a favourable opinion of the Christians, and procuring a cessation of those cruelties, which were at that time exercised against them. But had Justin attempted to deceive the Emperor, with the Senate, and People of Rome, by boldly asserting the genuineness of these relations, when he knew their authenticity was called into question; (and if it had been, he must have known it;) he could have had nothing to expect, but that some of the very numerous and powerful enemies of the Christians would have taken advantage of a conduct so highly culpable, to increase both the odium, and the persecution, which the Christians laboured under. This was so extremely obvious, that it was impossible for Justin not to reflect upon it. His having written

* See Justin's First Apology, N° 32, 33. Ed. Paris, 1742.

of these passages, therefore, in the manner he has; that is, his having positively asserted, as an acknowledged fact, which required no proof, that they were written by the same persons, who wrote the whole of those Gospels, of which they have been transmitted to us as genuine parts; in an Apology for the Christians; addressed, and delivered to the Emperor; purposely to excite a favourable disposition in the Emperor towards the Christians; is an ample proof, that their authenticity was not even questioned, (though the facts related in them were not believed by the Sects already mentioned;) when he wrote this Apology; that is, within fifty years after the death of the Apostle John.

AND this conclusion is very strongly confirmed by Justin's conduct in his Second Apology. Had the authenticity of these passages been at all doubtful, when in his First Apology he referred to them as of unquestioned authority; just as he would have referred to any other passages of the same Gospels; this artifice would quickly have been observed, and urged against him. And if, after this, he undertook to write, and present, a Second Apology, to the then Emperor; in order to induce him to mitigate the severities still exercised against the Christians; he must have made it his business in that Second Apology, to vindicate

dicare the passages in question from whatever doubts had been raised against them ; and to prove satisfactorily that they were authentic ; as in his First Apology he had, in the most unqualified manner, and without the least mention of any proof, affirmed them to be. But so far is this from being the case ; that in his Second Apology ; being led to mention, that Jesus was made man, by being born, in consequence of the will of God, and the Father ; he refers to what he had said before upon this point, as fully sufficient ; without adding any thing to confirm his former assertion*. And this certainly is a proof, that no objection had been made to his unqualified assertion of the authenticity of these passages, in his First Apology ; and consequently, that no doubts were entertained concerning it.

Nor is this all. The same conclusion which is thus established by Justin's two Apologies, is still further confirmed by his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. If any doubts had been entertained of the authenticity of these passages, when Justin wrote this Dialogue, those doubts must have been perfectly well known to the Jews in particular ;

* See Justin's Second Apology, N° 6, p. 93, same Edition ; and compare it with what he has said, First Apology, N° 32, 33.

and must have been alleged by them in their opposition to the faith in Jesus. And this Dialogue being designed by Justin as a professed proof of the truth of the Christian Revelation; and more especially as a refutation of such objections as were alleged by the Jews against it; if these passages had been objected to as spurious, at the time when this Dialogue was composed, and made public, it would not have been possible for Justin to have asserted their authenticity, and argued from them, as he does in this Dialogue; without, at the same time, introducing Trypho alleging such objections, to prove them spurious, as were known to be urged against them; and then, in reply to Trypho, producing such arguments as he thought valid; to shew that the objections urged by Trypho were of no force.

JUST in this manner we actually find, that when Justin has alleged the prophecy of Isaiah, — *A Virgin shall conceive, &c.* he immediately introduces Trypho replying to him, that he mistranslated the word in the Original; that it is not said by Isaiah, that a *Virgin*, but merely that “a *young woman*, shall conceive, &c. ;” and Justin then sets himself to refute this objection*. But though

* See the Dialogue with Trypho, N° 66, 67, p. 163, 164; and N° 84; p. 181, same Edition.

Justin

Justin argues repeatedly, and at great length, from this prophecy; and appeals particularly to the events recorded in the two first chapters of the Gospels of St. Matthew and Luke *, as of decisive authority, for the completion of it; and though he introduces Trypho objecting, that the fact, which Justin wants to establish upon the authority of these passages; that is, Jesus's having been born of a Virgin; was in itself almost, if not altogether, impossible †; yet he has not introduced Trypho suggesting so much as an idea, that the authenticity of the passages in which those miraculous events are recorded, and upon the authority of which Justin so entirely relied, was subject even to the smallest doubt ‡.

THERE can scarcely be conceived a stronger circumstantial proof than this, that when Justin wrote this Dialogue; which is judged to have been not long after his First Apology §; no doubts of the authenticity of these passages had ever been entertained; (though it was universally known, that Marcion, the Ebionites, and some other Sects, did not believe their contents;) and much less

* Dialogue with Trypho, N° 77, 78, 84; p. 174, 5, 6, and 181.

† Ibid. N° 68; p. 165.

‡ This appears from the passages just referred to.

§ See Lardner's Works, Vol. II. p. 117.

any idea of there having been a time, when these passages were first brought to light, by any small New Sect of Christians; and when, in consequence of their arguments in favour of them, they had been received by the Church at large, and inserted in all the copies of the two Gospels concerned; which till that time had not contained them.

JUSTIN shews, that before he wrote, it was the established practice to read the Gospels publicly in the Christian Congregations*: and his referring to these passages, just as he would have referred to any other passages of the same Gospels, as having certainly been written by the writers of the whole Gospels to which they belong; without referring to any proof of the point, or considering it as requiring any; is an absolute proof, not only that the copies of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke which were read in the Christian Congregations, and consequently those which were kept, and read, in private families, must have contained these passages; but that these passages were then, as well as before Justin wrote, held to be of just the same unexceptionable authority, as any other passages of those Gospels. And as this

* See the First Apology, N^o 67, p. 83. And Lardner's Works, Vol. II. p. 121, 122, 128, 129.

could

could not have been the case, if they had been first brought into notice, and added to the various copies of those Gospels, at any time between the death of the Apostle St. John, in the year 100, and the time when Justin wrote, before the year 150; or, indeed, several years sooner; the manner in which Justin has referred to these passages; in his two Apologies, and his Dialogue with Trypho; is a satisfactory proof, that these passages could not have been brought into notice, and added to the various copies of the Gospels concerned, either at any time after the death of the Apostle and Evangelist St. John; or for several years before it.

BESIDES, Justin was born, according to Some, in the year 89; or, according to Others, in the year 103; or, perhaps, between those periods; and after applying himself to the study of the doctrines of all the principal Sects of Philosophers, without being able to obtain satisfaction from any thing which they taught; at length set himself to examine the evidence, and the doctrines of Christianity; and became a convert to the Christian faith, when about thirty years of age*. His Conversion must have been founded upon his conviction of the authenticity of the Gospels, and

* See Lardner's Works, Vol. II. p. 115, 116.

the truth of the facts related in them. Whatever opinions any particulars in his writings may have given occasion to, either of his judgment, or his credulity; his sincerity is absolutely unimpeached. And as his enquiries into the authenticity, and truth, of the Gospels, previous to his conversion, must have been carried on, according to the above accounts, either about the year 130, if he was born in the year 103; or about the year 140, if he was born in 89; or in the interval between those years; that is, not more than thirty years, at the most; and perhaps not more than twenty, after the death of the Apostle John; if the passages in question had been first produced, and received, at any time after his death; or, indeed, several years before it; Justin, as well as every one else of his time, must have been fully acquainted with the whole history of their first publication, and subsequent reception; and must certainly have made some direct mention of, or at least, some allusion to, those circumstances, of so very singular a nature; not only in his first Apology, but more especially in his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. There is not even a possibility of conceiving that he could have omitted it.

THE first production of these most remarkable narratives, at any distance of time after the publication of their respective Gospels; and the subsequent

frequent reception of them, as authentic, by the Church at large ; together with the insertion of them in all their copies of those Gospels ; would have been events so exceedingly astonishing ; as to render it absolutely, and utterly incredible, that Justin could appeal to the miraculous facts related in these passages as unquestionably authentic ; without some express mention of, or at least some evident allusion to, their most unparalleled discovery, and introduction ; and the evidence upon which they had been received as authentic by the Church at large.

JUSTIN'S referring to these passages, therefore, and expressly affirming, that they were written by the same persons who wrote the whole history of Jesus ; just as he would have referred to any other passages of the Gospels to which they belong ; without even the slightest hint of their having been first brought to light, and at length adopted, at some time subsequent to the first publication of those Gospels ; whether after the death of the Apostle John, or before it ; is an absolutely decisive proof, that no such discovery, and reception, of these passages had been heard of, in the time of Justin ; and consequently, that they must have made a part of their respective Gospels, just as they now do, when those Gospels were first

first delivered to the disciples by the Evangelists who wrote them.

VIII. AND to this positive evidence of the authenticity of the passages in question, drawn from the unqualified assertion of it by Justin; without any reference or allusion whatever, to their first introduction, or the evidence upon which they had been received, as genuine, by the Church, when first produced; (which it is utterly incredible that Justin could have omitted, if there had been a time, when the several copies of the Gospels concerned, in public and private use, did not contain them; and after which time the passages in question had been inserted in them;) we may add almost as strong a confirmation of it, from the conduct, as well of those Sects of Christians, who disbelieved the facts related in these passages, and therefore rejected them; as of the most distinguished of those professed Enemies to the Christian faith, who exerted all their abilities to overthrow it.

• ONE of the earliest Sects of any note, who disbelieved the Miraculous Conception of Jesus, was that of the Cerinthians; whose founder is judged to have begun to spread his doctrines, if not very near the end of the first Century; at the latest

latest in the beginning of the Second*. It appears highly probable, that Cerinthus, and his followers, though they received the Gospel of St. Matthew, yet disbelieved that part of the first chapter, in which it is related that the Virgin Mary was found with child of the Holy Ghost; and held, that Jesus was the Son of Joseph and Mary; since it is certain, that they believed Jesus to be nothing more than a mere man†. But this doctrine of their Sect affords not any reason for supposing, that they disbelieved this part of the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, because they alleged any evidence, to prove that it was not an authentic part of his Gospel;—for the same authority which informs us, that they rejected this passage of St. Matthew's Gospel, informs us likewise, that they rejected St. Paul, and his Epistles; and That, not because they alleged any evidence to prove that St. Paul was not an authorized Apostle, which he most certainly was; or, that the Epistles made public in his name were not really his, which they most

* See *Marth's Translation of Michaelis's Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. I. p. 36. And *Lardner's Works*, Vol. IX. p. 323, 324; and 330 near the end.

† See the quotations from Irenæus, and Epiphanius, in *Lardner's Works*, Vol. IX. p. 319, 321; and from Theodoret, p. 322, and note x; and 325, 326; and 329, note g.

undoubtedly were; but merely because they could not bring themselves to admit the doctrine of the abolition of the Jewish Law by the Gospel*; which St. Paul, in his preaching, and Epistles, very strongly enforced. And just in the same manner, we have reason to conclude, they rejected the part in question of the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel; and of course the correspondent passage of St. Luke's; not because they were possessed of any evidence to prove that those passages were interpolations; but merely because they could not bring themselves to believe the reality of that particular miraculous fact, which is in those passages affirmed to have come to pass; but which they regarded as impossible.

AND the same observation is equally applicable to another Sect of note, the Ebionites; who existed early in the second Century; though they are not judged to have sprung up so soon as the Cerinthians. The Ebionites were divided into two parties; One of which received the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, and believed that Jesus was of the Holy Ghost, and the Virgin Mary; while the Other, like the Cerinthians,

* Lardner's Works, Vol. IX. p. 322, from Epiphanius; and p. 327, from Epiphanius and Jerom. And Marsh's Translation, &c. as before, Vol. I. p. 36.

beld that Jesus was born of Joseph and Mary; and must therefore have disbelieved that part of the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel, in which the Virgin is said to have been found with child of the Holy Ghost; if not, as it is affirmed, the whole two first chapters*; and of course the corresponding passages of St. Luke's. But we have no reason to imagine, that their disbelief of these passages was occasioned by any thing more than their persuasion, that the miraculous Conception was impossible; or, more especially, that it arose from any evidence, which induced them to believe, that these chapters, or any part of them, had been forged; for They, like the Cerinthians, would not pay any regard to St. Paul, as an Apostle; or to his Epistles; merely because they would not admit the doctrine, that the Law of Moses was superseded by the Gospel†.

IX.

* Lardner's Works, Vol. VII. p. 19—23. Vol. II. p. 307, 308, and 143.

† Marsh's Translation, &c. Vol. I. p. 36, 37. The quotation from Eusebius in Lardner's Works, Vol. VII. p. 20, and Vol. II. p. 354.—It has now been assumed, that both the Cerinthians, and the Ebionites, knew not only what doctrine St. Paul had preached, but likewise what he had insisted on in his Epistles; and that on account of that doctrine, they rejected both Him, and his Epistles.—That this was the case with the Cerinthians is strongly implied by Epiphanius;

in

IX. AND that, in fact, neither these, nor any other, of the earliest Sects, who disbelieved the nar-

in the passage quoted from him, in Marsh's Translation of Michaelis's Introduction, &c. Vol. I. p. 36; and expressly affirmed by Eusebius, with regard to the Ebionites, in the passage quoted from him, in Lardner's Works, Vol. I. p. 20. —But whether they were acquainted with any of St. Paul's Epistles, or not, is in reality a point of no moment whatever to the present argument. For since it is certain, that they rejected St. Paul himself, for teaching, in his Discourses, that the Law was superseded by the Gospel; no doubt can be entertained, but that they rejected his Epistles, likewise, for insisting on the same doctrine; if the fact was, that the contents of his Epistles, at the least, did come to their knowledge: And that That was the case, appears very highly probable. St. Paul's Epistles are judged to have been written between the years 52 and 63. They were designed by the Apostle, as we have already seen, (p. 15, 16,) to be communicated to all the disciples, as extensively as might be; and it appears from ch. iii. 16, of the 2d Epistle General of St. Peter; judged to have been written about the year 64; that the knowledge of them was even at that time very generally spread. The Sect of the Cerinthians did not spring up into notice till just the end of the first Century, or the very beginning of the Second; and that of the Ebionites not till the Second. And in this interval, between the year 64 and the end of the first Century, the knowledge of St. Paul's Epistles must have become so much more general still, as to render it very highly improbable, that the Cerinthians and Ebionites should not, at least, have heard of them; and especially, of their insisting very strongly on that doctrine, of the Law's being superseded by the

narratives contained in the first and second chapters of the Gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Luke, either had, or even pretended to have, any evidence, to prove that those narratives were not authentic parts of the Gospels in which they are found, will fully appear, from considering the conduct, as well of some of the most distinguished Separatists from the Catholic Church; as of some of the most determined Opposers of the Christian faith.

So early as soon after the year 130, Marcion, who was the Son of a Bishop, and himself a priest, quitted the Catholic Church; and became a most violent preacher of peculiar doctrines, of his own invention*. Before this time the Sects of the Cerinthians, and the Ebionites, had become established, and their doctrines well known; and if they had founded their disbelief of the first and second chapters of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, upon any evidence which they alleged, to prove them surreptitious; That evidence must

the Gospel, for which they rejected St. Paul himself, as a false Apostle.—Whoever would receive pleasure from a new, and convincing proof of the authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles, will do well to peruse the *Horæ Paulinæ* of Archdeacon Paley.

* Marsh's Translation, &c. Vol. I. p. 37, 38.—Lardner's Works, Vol. IX. p. 359—361.

have

have been perfectly well known to Marcion; and Marcion, who agreed with them in rejecting those chapters*, would certainly have alleged it, to add so much strength to his own reasons, whatever they might be, for rejecting them likewise. But that Marcion did not allege any evidence of this kind against those Chapters; and consequently, that neither the Cerinthians, nor the Ebionites, had alleged any before him; the manner in which Tertullian has written against him, in relation to this particular point, will fully convince us.

MARCION rejected all the Gospels, except that of Luke †; and of this he left out the two first chapters, as well as a great number of other passages; and altered many more ‡. Tertullian, when, in the course of his treatise against Marcion, he comes to consider his conduct in this particular, argues against him in the following manner. "I say, that my copy is the true one; " Marcion, that his is so. I affirm, that Marcion's copy is adulterated; Marcion, that mine " is so. Who shall determine between us, if not " a regard to the age of the copies in question; " adjudging That to be of authority, which shall

* Lardner's Works, Vol. IX. p. 396.

† Ibid. Vol. IX. p. 393—395.

‡ Ibid.

" be

“ be found to be the most ancient ; and con-
 “ demning That as corrupted, which shall be
 “ found to have been the most modern. For as
 “ certain as it is, that the false must be a corrup-
 “ tion of the true ; so certain is it, that the true
 “ must have preceded the false*.” Then, after
 observing, that That Gospel of St. Luke, which
 was received by the Catholic Church, was indis-
 putably prior to that of Marcion ; since Marcion
 himself had originally received it, before he
 quitted the Catholic Church ; and before he
 framed his own copy ; which was new, and
 had no existence till he himself had framed it ;
 after observing this, Tertullian proceeds to say ;
 “ In a word, if it is certain, that That is the
 “ most genuine, which is the most ancient ;
 “ That the most ancient, which is from the be-
 “ ginning ; and That from the beginning, which is
 “ from the Apostles ; it is no less certain, that
 “ That must have been delivered down from the
 “ Apostles, which has been held sacred in the
 “ Churches founded by the Apostles †.”—And
 presently after he adds,—“ I affirm, therefore,
 “ that That Gospel of Luke, the genuineness of

* Tertull. contra Marcion. Lib. iv. c. iv. p. 415. B. Ed.
 Paris, 1664.

† Ibid. D. 5.

“ which

“ which we most earnestly defend, has been acknowledged, not only by all the Churches founded by the Apostles; but likewise by every Church in Communion with them; from the very time of its being first made public: but that That of Marcion is not so much as known to many of them; and is known only to be condemned, by every one of them to which it is known*.”

NOTHING can be more obvious, than that if Marcion had alleged any evidence, to prove that the two first chapters of Luke's Gospel were an interpolation, Tertullian could not have written as he here has. If that had been the case, he could not but have stated, in this very place, the evidence which Marcion had produced for that purpose; and have set himself to refute it. Or, if he had before stated, and, as he thought, refuted it, in any other passage; he must in this place have referred to his statement, and refutation of it, in that passage.

At the time when Tertullian wrote, and made public, his treatise against Marcion, the followers of Marcion were very numerous†; and his writings were not only in all their hands, but like-

* Ibid. D. 5.

† Lardner's Works, Vol. IX. p. 366, 367.

wife very generally known to those of the Catholic Church. Under these circumstances, Tertullian could not set himself down to write, at great length, a full, and argumentative refutation of the errors of Marcion; without being conscious, that if he peremptorily asserted the genuineness of that copy of the Gospel of Luke, which was received by the Catholic Church; but, at the same time, passed over unanswered, and even unnoticed, any evidence, which Marcion had alleged, to prove that the two first chapters of it were spurious; he would not only have injured the cause which he undertook to defend; but must have rendered himself the object of deserved ridicule and contempt.

WHEN, therefore, we find Tertullian putting the question, Who shall decide between Marcion and me, Whether that copy of St. Luke's Gospel, which is received by the Catholic Church, or That which Marcion settled for himself, is the genuine and true copy; and asserting, that the copy received by the Church had been held sacred by all the Churches founded by the Apostles, as well as all those in Communion with them, from the time of its having been first made public by St. Luke; without so much as mentioning, that Marcion had urged any evidence whatever, to prove that the two first chapters of that copy were

forged ; we cannot but be satisfied that the fact was, that though Marcion had rejected those chapters, as not believing their contents ; he had not alleged any evidence, to prove them surreptitious.

AND that this was the case, will further appear, from some other, very particular, circumstances. Marcion received, in a certain manner, the Gospel of St. Luke ; but he rejected the two first chapters, and several other passages ; altered many more ; and added such particulars as he chose* ; before he proposed it to his followers, as the Gospel proper to be adopted. But, after having made it, in this manner, such as he chose to have it ; he did not presume to call it the Gospel of St. Luke ; or prefix to it the name of any other person, as its author † : a plain, though tacit proof, that he did not reject the two first chapters in consequence of having alleged any evidence, to prove that they were not authentic passages of that Gospel, which St. Luke had written, and delivered to the Church.

AND that Marcion was capable of rejecting, without scruple, whatever passages of St. Luke's Gospel he disliked, without having any evidence,

* Lardner's Works, Vol. IX. p. 393—402.

† Ibid. p. 324. Tertullian against Marcion, Lib. iv. ch. ii. C. p. 414, Ed. Paris, 1664.

of their being spurious ; is beyond question evident, from his similar conduct in other instances. He rejected the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John ; and the Acts of the Apostles *. Whereas the authenticity of those books, which he was pleased to reject, was just as well ascertained as that of the Gospel of Luke, which he, in a certain manner, received ; but, at the same time altered, just as the notions, which he entertained, led him to alter it †.

In reality, the situation and conduct of Marcion ; when considered, as they ought to be, together ; afford an absolutely decisive proof, that those passages of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which contain the accounts of the conceptions, and births, of John the Baptist, and Jesus, must have been authentic parts of their respective Gospels. Marcion rejected these accounts as false ; he would certainly therefore have produced evidence, if he could have produced any, to prove that they were forged : and he was so circumstanced, that if, in fact, they had been forged, he must have known it, and have been able to give the world an authentic account of the forgery. He was the son of a Bishop ; was educated pur-

* Lardner's Works, Vol. IX. p. 393, 4.—403—5.

† Ibid. p. 396—402.

posely for the church ; became a Priest ; and after having continued several years in the discharge of the duties of that clerical office, revolted from the Church ; and began preaching his own doctrines, not much later than the year 130. If the narratives in question had not been contained in the original Gospels ; but had been first brought forward in the beginning of the Second Century, after the death of the Apostle John, the last of the Apostles ; (sooner than which, we have seen long ago, they must have met with St. John's authoritative condemnation ;)—Or even if they had been brought forward before the death of St. John ; and by the management of those who forged, and produced them, had been admitted as genuine by the Church ; and then inserted in all their copies of the Gospels concerned ;—If even this had been the case ; Marcion, from his situation in the family of the Bishop his father ; (who must have been in the Church, at the very time when these forgeries were brought forward ; and must have known all the circumstances which had accompanied their reception ;) as well as from his own education for, and admission into the Church, very shortly after their reception must have taken place ; could not but have been fully acquainted with the whole history of this most unparalleled transaction. And when at length he came to revolt
from

from the Church ; and among the numerous alterations which he thought fit to make in the Gospels, rejected these very remarkable passages, which had been so introduced ; he would, no doubt, have given the world a particular detail of the time, and manner, of their first introduction ; to convince every one that they had been forged. And as his followers were numerous, and his writings were not only in their hands, but read by those of the Church likewise ; (several of whom wrote in answer to him ;) if Marcion had given any such account of the first introduction of these passages, evident it is, that no writer of the Church could afterwards have contended for them as authentic, without making particular mention of Marcion's account of their first introduction, and forgery ; and endeavouring to refute it.

In particular, it would have been absolutely impossible for Tertullian, when writing expressly in reply to Marcion, to have asserted ; as we have seen he has ; that That Gospel of St. Luke, in which the longest, and most remarkable, of these passages was contained, had been received by all the Churches founded by the Apostles, and all those in communion with them, from the very time of its having been first made public by St. Luke ; without taking any notice whatever of Marcion's charge of their late introduction, and forgery.

And no less impossible would it have been for Justin Martyr ; who wrote but a few years after Marcion himself wrote, and even while he was still living ; to have asserted the genuineness of these passages, in the manner we have seen he has ; both in his First Apology, and his Dialogue with Trypho ; without making the least mention of any evidence brought by Marcion against them.

SINCE therefore, if the passages in question had been forged, and added to the genuine copies of their respective Gospels, after the death of the Apostle John ; or indeed several years before it ; Marcion must have known the whole history of their introduction ; and would certainly have published an account of it, as an absolutely unanswerable reason for rejecting them ; and since it is no less certain, from the manner in which both Justin Martyr, and Tertullian, have asserted the genuineness of these passages, that Marcion had not alleged any evidence to impeach their authenticity ; though he disbelieved their contents, and rejected them ; the consequence is unavoidable, that these passages must have made a part of their respective Gospels, when those Gospels were first made public by the Evangelists who wrote them *.

X. Non

* In fact, the reveries of Marcion, relating to Jesus, are alone sufficient to shew, that his rejection of those passages in which

X. Not long after the middle of the Second Century flourished Celsus, one of the most able, and malicious adversaries of the Christian cause *. But from his manner of writing against it we shall unavoidably be convinced, that neither he, nor any one who preceded him, made any attempt, or alleged any evidence, to prove, that the history of the conceptions, and births, of John the Baptist and Jesus, contained in the two first chapters of the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke, were not genuine parts of those Gospels.

The work of Celsus, indeed, in which he endeavoured to overthrow the credit of the Gospel, is not extant; but Origen's answer to it is written in so regular a manner, and furnishes so many

which the Miraculous Conception, and birth, of Jesus, are recorded, ought not to be considered as of any weight whatever, in judging of the authenticity of those passages. For though he rejected the histories of Jesus's Miraculous Conception, he did not regard him as the Son of Joseph and Mary, born in the natural way; on the contrary, he taught, that Jesus, not having any real body, but only the appearance of one, was not born at all; but descended from above, already in that state, in which he publicly addressed himself to the Jews; and immediately entered upon the duties of his Mission. See Lardner's Works, Vol. IX. p. 371—380. That is, B. ii. ch. x. sect. 19.

* Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII. p. 57. sub fin.—Marth's Translation, &c. Vol. I. p. 40.

extracts

extracts from it, as to be abundantly sufficient to prove this point.

FROM the pains taken by Celsus to fix the charge of falsehood upon a great variety of facts related in the Gospels, it will not admit of a doubt, but that if he could have produced any evidence, to prove that the passages, in which any of those facts are related, were forged, he would most certainly have brought that evidence forward, to convict the Christians of such forgeries. It is likewise no less certain; as well from the necessity of the thing, as from the very regular manner in which Origen produces, and replies to, his objections; that if Celsus had alleged any such evidence, Origen must, and would, have extracted the passages in which it was contained, and have set himself to refute it. This cannot be doubted; since it is not only manifest, that he would have betrayed the cause he had undertaken to defend, and exposed himself to contempt; but likewise, that he would shamefully have failed of fulfilling his own remarkable and voluntary promise; if he had not done so.

ORIGEN expressly says, that "left any one should
 " imagine he purposely passed over, without any
 " notice, such of Celsus's objections as he was
 " conscious he could not make any reply to; he
 " would answer to every one of them, in the best
 " manner

“ manner he was able; and That, not in the order
 “ which the natural connexion of the subjects
 “ would point out; but in the very same order in
 “ which Celsus had introduced them in his own
 “ work *.”

AFTER this voluntary promise it cannot be imagined, if Celsus had objected to any remarkable passages as spurious additions to the original Gospels; and alleged any evidence to prove the charge, that Origen could have omitted to state those objections, or the evidence by which Celsus endeavoured to support them; and to give them such answers as the circumstances of each particular charge should have suggested to him. Evidence, against the authenticity of any remarkable passages, would have been the most fatal of all objections to the credit of the Gospels; and that particular objection, therefore, which it is utterly incredible, that Origen could pass over without notice. But the fact is, that Origen has not made mention of any charge of this kind, as having been brought forward by Celsus. The arguments produced by Origen, as alleged by Celsus, to discredit those relations of facts, which he considered as utterly false, were intended to shew, that the particulars related were, either in themselves, or their cir-

* Origines contra Celsum, Lib. i. sect. 41.

cumstances,

extraneous, incredible; not that the passages in which they are related were spurious additions to the Gospels in which they are found.

Thus, with respect to the very passages under consideration, Celsus particularly mentioned, That it was pretended, that Jesus was born of a Virgin;—that an angel appeared to Joseph, on account of Mary's being found with child, to assure him it was of the holy host;—that a star appeared at his birth, which occasioned certain Chaldeans to come to worship him while an infant;—that Herod massacred certain children with a view to destroy him;—and that an Angel had before appeared to Joseph, directing him to go with Jesus into Egypt, in order to preserve him*.—But, though Celsus regarded all these asserted facts, as well as a great number more throughout the Gospels, as so many mere pretences, and absolute falsehoods; and started such objections to the facts themselves, as he thought sufficient to prove, that they could not have taken place; Origen makes no mention of his having suggested even so much as a suspicion, that the passages, in which these facts are asserted to have

* See Dr. Doddridge's *Epitome of Origen against Celsus*; Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII. p. 63; and Dr. John Leland's *Epitome*, p. 66, and especially, p. 67.

come to pass, were not authentic parts of those Gospels in which they are found. Nay, on the contrary, it actually appears, that Celsus mentioned the relations of the facts contained in these passages, as having been warranted by Jesus himself* ; from which it is evident, that Celsus must have regarded the passages containing them as authentic parts of those histories of Jesus, which were written by his chosen disciples, and their assistants in preaching his Gospel †.

ORIGEN has, indeed, preserved a passage, and shewn his integrity by preserving it, in which Celsus accuses the Christians, “of changing, and perverting the original text of the Gospel, three times, four times, and oftener, in order to defeat objections urged against them ‡.” But this charge, it is evident, could not relate to any passages, but such as might have their difficulties attempted to be removed by various readings §. It is, in its very nature, totally inappli-

* See the passage from Origen against Celsus, quoted in Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII. p. 19, N° 3.—p. 20, N° 7.

† See Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII. p. 67 ; and the passages cited from Origen, Ibid. p. 19, N° 3 ;—p. 20, N° 7 ;—p. 21, N° 8 ;—p. 22, N° 9.

‡ Contra Celsum, Lib. ii. 27.

§ In relation to the import of this charge of Celsus, see Marsh's Translation, &c. Vol. I. p. 40, 41.

cable to the question before us. Whether the accounts of the conceptions, and births, of John the Baptist, and Jesus; contained in the first and second chapters of the Gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Luke, as they have been delivered down to us; are authentic parts of those Gospels; or were clandestinely foisted into them, at some time after they had been made public by the Evangelists who wrote them; The facts recorded in these relations are such, that no alterations of the original text could possibly remove any objections which might be raised against them: so that it is certain, this charge of Celsus; whether true, or false, with regard to any passages whatever; could not be alleged against the relations of Jesus's Miraculous Conception.

AND as it appears, from Celsus's repeated mention of these relations, that he was particularly desirous of discrediting them; but that he levelled his objections to them, against either the truth, or the probability, of the facts themselves; without suggesting even a suspicion against the authenticity of the passages in which they are related; and that, in reality, he certainly considered those passages as authentic*; we are not only war-

* See the passage from Origen against Celsus quoted in Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII. p. 19, N^o 3, 4, 5.—And p. 20.
N^o

warranted in concluding, but we are absolutely obliged to conclude, that Celsus knew not of any evidence, to be alleged against their authenticity; and therefore, that neither Marcion, nor the Sect of the Cerinthians, nor that of the Ebionites; with all of whom Celsus agreed in disbelieving the particulars contained in these relations, and with whose objections to them Celsus must have been acquainted; had produced any*.

XI. IF then the least countenance for any suspicion, that the passages in question might be forged, can be derived from the disbelief of any of those who rejected them; it must be founded on the objections of the two most virulent enemies of Christianity after the time of Celsus;

Nº 7.—And p. 21. Nº 8. And Dr. John Leland's Epitome of Celsus, Ibid. p. 67.

* Accordingly it is observable, of the Writers of the Church at large, who asserted the truth of the Miraculous Conception; in opposition to the several Sects, of the beginning of the Second Century, who disbelieved it; that they generally suggest some consideration, with a view to shew, that such a Conception was not impossible; without alleging a syllable in support of the authenticity of the passages in which it is recorded.—A very remarkable corroborating proof, that, though the several Sects denied the possibility of such a fact, they brought no evidence to impeach the authenticity of the passages in which it was recorded.

Por-

Porphyry, and Julian. But the only evidence afforded us, by what happens to be preserved of their writings, will be found, on the contrary, to confirm the authenticity of the passages concerned.

THE writings of Porphyry against the Christians having been over zealously destroyed, and the several professed answers to them being lost, only a very few passages of them have come down to us; by being incidentally inserted, and replied to, in the Works of some of the Christian Writers. But from such of the objections of Porphyry as are thus preserved, it appears, that they, like those of Celsus, were levelled at the particular facts related in such passages as he objected to, not at the authenticity of the passages themselves*.

THUS Porphyry accused Matthew of committing a mistake, in ch. i. 11, 12; that is, in his account of the genealogy of Jesus; which is immediately connected with the different passages under consideration. And as Jerom has preserved, and replied to, this accusation of a mistake†; and if Porphyry had objected to this first chapter

* See Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII. 207—215.

† See the objection of Porphyry, and Jerom's answer, in Lardner's Works, Vol VIII. p. 207. N^o VII. note 9.

as spurious, Jerom would at the same time have noticed, and replied to, that charge more especially; but he has not given the least intimation, that Porphyry had alleged any such charge; we are under a necessity of concluding, that he certainly had not.

AND that this was the fact will be abundantly evident from the writings of Julian.

As Porphyry's work against the Christians was extant even long after the time of Julian*; and was written with the same zealous desire to destroy the credit of Christianity, with which Julian himself wrote; no question can be made, but that Julian was perfectly well acquainted with its contents, when he sat down to write against the Christians himself. It must therefore be allowed, that if he had found any evidence produced by Porphyry, which could impeach the authenticity of any passages of the Gospels, the contents of which Julian himself regarded as falsehoods; he would certainly have urged that evidence against those passages, or at least have referred to it, in his own work.

* See Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII. p. 2, 181, 182; and 356.—Constantine ordered Porphyry's Work against the Christians to be destroyed, before the year 325; but that order could not have had its intended effect; since Theodosius the Younger issued a decree for abolishing Porphyry's Works, in the year 449: whereas Julian died in the year 363.

IF therefore Julian; instead of alleging any evidence, to prove that the accounts of the Miraculous Conception of Jesus were spurious, or even of doubtful authority; did not even suggest any suspicion of the kind; but, on the contrary, argued against the facts related in them in such a manner, as to shew, that he regarded those accounts as genuine parts of the Gospels in which they are contained; if this is the case; it must be agreed, that neither Porphyry, nor Julian, knew of any reason for calling the authenticity of these passages into question; and therefore, that their authority is as unexceptionable, as that of the Gospels of which they are a part.

AND from some passages of the Work of Julian, which Cyril, in his answer to it, has preserved, this appears to have been the fact.

IN one passage, where he is contending, that certain prophecies of the Old Testament, which the Christians applied to Jesus, did not relate to him; Julian proceeds to say;—" But that none
 " of these things belong to Jesus is manifest; for
 " neither is he of Judah: and how should he be
 " so; when, according to you, (Christians) he
 " was not born of Joseph, but of the Holy
 " Ghost? When you reckon up the genealogy
 " of Joseph, you carry it up to Judah: but you
 " have not been able to contrive this dexterously;
 " for

“ for Matthew, and Luke, have been shewn to differ with one another, about the genealogy *.” Here it is manifest, that Julian not only speaks of the Miraculous Conception of Jesus, as the acknowledged doctrine of the Christian Church; but of Matthew, and Luke, as the authors of the genealogies, which are immediately connected with those accounts of the Conception of Jesus, which are contained in the passages under consideration. For if Julian had regarded these accounts as forgeries, which had been clandestinely inserted in the Gospels of St. Matthew, and St. Luke, no question can be made, but that he would here have expressed that opinion of them; together with some allusion, at least, to the evidence upon which he embraced it; in order to brand the Christians with the infamy of not only believing accounts of miracles, which he held to be wholly fictitious; but even of forging the very passages in which those miracles were related.

AND that Julian had not a doubt of the authenticity of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, is evident from another passage, which has been preserved by Jerom, in his Comment on Hosea, ch. xj. 1.—In Matthew ii. 14, 15, it

* See the passage in Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII. p. 397, and p. 398, note p.

is said :—*When he (Joseph) arose, he took the young child and his Mother, by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet; saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son.*—And upon this passage Jerom says;—“ The Emperor Julian, in the seventh volume of his malicious work against the Christians, vents his calumny upon this passage, and says, “ that the Evangelist Matthew has here transferred “ to Christ, what was written of Israel; in order “ to impose upon the simplicity of the Gentile “ converts to Christianity*.”—It is evident, that Julian could not have brought this accusation against St. Matthew, if he had not regarded this passage as an authentic passage of his Gospel. If he had considered the passage as spurious, he would have laid the supposed mistake to the charge of the forgers of the passage, not of the Apostle: and if he had considered it even as of doubtful authority, he must on this occasion have made some mention of those doubts. And, in either case, it would not have been possible for Jerom to have represented Julian as laying this attempt, to impose upon the Gentile Converts,

* See the passage quoted from Jerom, in Lardner's Works, Vol. VIII. p. 398, note g.

to the charge of Matthew himself, instead of his supposed interpolator.

IN [another passage, which happens to have been preserved, Julian says,—“Jesus, whom you celebrate, was one of Cæsar’s subjects. If you dispute it, I will prove it by and by; but it may as well be done now. For yourselves allow, that he was enrolled, with his father and mother, in the time of Cyrenius *.”—

Here Julian alleges a passage, which is in the midst of the history of the Miraculous Conception, and birth, of Jesus; contained in the two first chapters of the Gospel of Luke; as an authority decisive of the fact which he brings it to prove. And this he certainly could not have done, unless he had regarded the narratives contained in those chapters as authentic parts of that Gospel.

XII. HERE therefore we may close our enquiries; and take a short review of the evidence with which the circumstances of the case have supplied us, in proof of the authenticity of the passages under consideration.

In the first place it has been found, not only that the forgeries in question are, in their very

* See the passage quoted, Ibid. p. 388, 389.

nature, utterly incredible; but likewise, from the circumstances, and the manner, in which the Gospel was first preached by the Apostles, that no time whatever can be assigned for the introduction of these supposed forgeries, at which it is not absolutely incredible, that an attempt to introduce them could have succeeded.

THEY could not possibly have gained admittance during the first sixteen, or seventeen, years after the Ascension; while all the Apostles in general continued in, and round about Judea; engaged in the very business of preaching the Gospel.

THEY could not have escaped being detected by James the Just; the first Head, or Bishop, of the Christian Church in Judea; if they had been brought forward within thirty years after the Ascension; that is, at any time before the year 62; in which year James was put to death at Jerusalem.

THEY would certainly have been exploded by the authority of the Apostle, and Evangelist, St. John; if the attempt to impose them upon the belief of the Church had been made at any time before the close of the first Century; to which period St. John lived.

It is self-evident, that the common sense of Christians must have caused them to be rejected,
with

with disdain; if they had been forged, and first made public, so late as after the death of the Apostle, and Evangelist, St. John; that is, after the beginning of the Second Century; or even several years earlier.

AND it is indisputably certain; from the manner in which the facts related in the passages in question are repeatedly mentioned by Justin Martyr; that those passages were actually held, by the Church at large, to be of just the same authority as any other parts of the Gospels to which they belong; in the very early part of the Second Century; not merely before Justin wrote; but likewise before he began to make those enquiries into the evidence for the truth of Christianity, in consequence of which he became a convert to the faith in Jesus. And this could not possibly have been the case, unless they had made a part of those Gospels, and been regarded as an unquestionably authentic part of them, before the end of the First Century; when they must have been known to, and confirmed by the authority of, the Apostle, and Evangelist, St. John.

IN addition to this connected series of evidence; which absolutely precludes all possibility of the forgeries in question; another particular has been pointed out, which is alone of sufficient weight to be absolutely decisive of the question. The

history of the Church, with respect to these passages, is just the very reverse of what it must have been, if they had not been authentic. If the Gospels of Matthew, and Luke, had been originally made public, by those Evangelists, without the passages under consideration; and these passages had been forged at some subsequent period, whenever that might be; one of the following circumstances must have taken place.—Either the Church at large must have rejected these forgeries; and it must have been only some particular Sects who admitted them; and then they could not have been transmitted to us, by the Church at large, as authentic parts of their respective Gospels; as they actually have been;—Or else, there must have been a certain time, at which the Church at large first came to acknowledge them; and, accordingly, first inserted them in all their copies of those Gospels, of which they have been transmitted to us, by the Church at large, as authentic parts.—And if that had been the case, some account of these most remarkable events must have been given, by those early Christian Writers, who were the first to defend the Christian cause, or to preserve the history of the Church. Whereas the real fact is, that the history of the Church is directly contradictory to every idea of this kind. It is incontrovertibly certain, that it
was

was only some well known Sects, not the Church at large, who ever did disbelieve the particulars contained in the passages in question ; and there is not the least imaginable hint of there having been a time, after the original publication of the Gospels concerned, when the Church was not in possession of these passages, and did not regard them as authentic parts of the Gospels to which they belong.

THE aggregate force of this series of evidence is far more than sufficient to determine the point in question. But because it is certain, that the contents of these passages were disbelieved by some of the early Christian Sects ; as well as by the professed Enemies of the Gospel ; we have proceeded to enquire further, Whether this disbelief of theirs was founded upon any supposed evidence, that the passages concerned were spurious.—And with regard to this point it has appeared ;

THAT the Cerinthians, and one branch of the Ebionites, rejected the Miraculous Conception of Jesus, as false ; regarding it as impossible ; but without alleging any evidence, to prove that the passages containing the accounts of it were forged : just as they rejected St. Paul, and his Epistles ; not because they alleged any evidence, to prove that St. Paul was not an Apostle ; or that the Epistles attributed to him were not authentic ; but
because

because St. Paul preached, and his Epistles very strongly inculcated, some doctrines, which they could not bring themselves to receive.

THAT next after these Sects, the Miraculous Conception was rejected by Marcion. But that neither did Marcion found his rejection of it upon any supposed Evidence, that the passages containing the accounts of it were forged, is abundantly evident; as well from Tertullian's manner of replying to him; and Justin Martyr's manner of referring to the passages concerned; as from Marcion's rejecting likewise the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John; and the Acts of the Apostles; the evidence in favour of which is not less satisfactory, than that for the Gospel of Luke; the only one which it pleased Marcion, in a certain manner, to admit. And besides, with regard to Marcion, it has still further appeared; that if these passages had been forged, He must have been perfectly well acquainted with the history of their first introduction; and would certainly have published it, to shew the propriety of his own conduct in rejecting them.

THAT not long after the time of Marcion, Celsus exerted his abilities in a work, the professed object of which was to explode the Christian faith. But by means of some passages of that work,

work, which have been preserved by Origen in his answer to it, it appears, that though Celsus utterly disbelieved the Miraculous Conception of Jesus; and must have been perfectly well acquainted with the objections made to it both by Marcion, and the other Sects abovementioned, who disbelieved it likewise; yet he knew of no evidence to be alleged against the authenticity of the passages in which it is related; and himself regarded them as authentic parts of their respective Gospels.

AND that, in fine, Celsus was succeeded by the two most virulent writers against the Christian cause, Porphyry, and Julian. But that from some passages of the works of Julian; who must certainly have been well acquainted with all the objections urged before him, by Porphyry, Celsus, and Marcion; it is manifest, that Julian likewise, though he regarded all the particulars related of the Miraculous Conception of Jesus as so many absolute falsehoods; yet considered those passages of the Gospels, in which these particulars are related, as having been written by the Evangelists themselves.

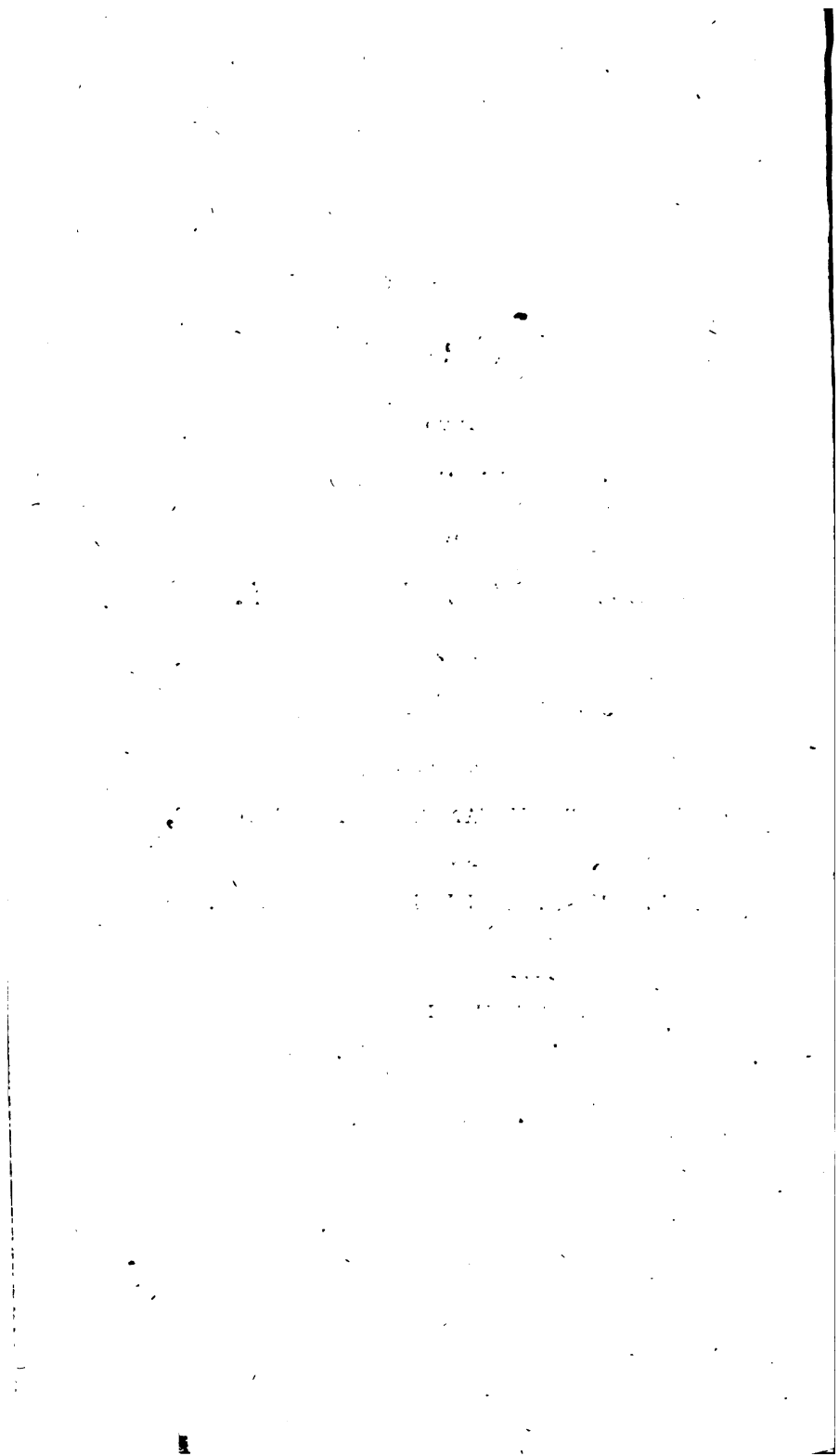
FROM all those circumstances, therefore, the joint evidence of which can alone decide the question; and the joint evidence of which is, in fact, far more than sufficient to decide it; the
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authenticity of the passages concerned appears not only ascertained, but full as abundantly ascertained, as that of any other passages of the Gospels, the contents of which were never disbelieved by any of the early Christian Sects. For these passages have not only the unexceptionable testimony of the Church at large, just as much as any other passages of the same Gospels, in their favour; but as their contents were disbelieved by some of the earliest Christian Sects; who regarded the facts related in them as impossible; there cannot be a doubt, but that if any evidence could have been produced to impeach their authenticity, it would certainly have been brought forward, and enforced, by those Sects who disbelieved their contents, at the very time when it could have been substantiated; and they must inevitably have been exploded.

AN
ENQUIRY
INTO
THE DIVINE MISSIONS.
OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST;
AND
JESUS CHRIST;

SO FAR AS THEY CAN BE PROVED
FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR BIRTHS,
AND
THEIR CONNEXION WITH EACH OTHER.

THE THIRD EDITION.



PREFACE

TO THE
FIRST EDITION.

IN perusing the Evangelic Writings, the Author of the following sheets imagined, that he had discovered an argument of their truth, which had been hitherto overlooked, or very slightly mentioned. He caught it with joy, and pursued it with eagerness. He found the proof, which at first glimmered faintly as it lay dispersed, grow brighter as the sparks were brought nearer together. He traced the different lines of inference, and perceived that they met at last in one central truth. And he flatters himself with having shewn once

PREFACE.

more, what was more than sufficiently shewn before, that our Religion is from God. He hopes, that he has added another ray to the splendor of its evidence; and another motive to the power of its influence.

If the argument be really conclusive, it will stand the test of examination; if not, it is for the interest of truth and religion, that its weakness be detected. Whatever judgment be passed upon it, the Author has at least this satisfactory consideration; that every other proof will remain uninjured, and unimpaired. And he therefore submits this Essay to the Public, as the attempt of one whose design is good; and who will have done no harm, though his performance prove defective.

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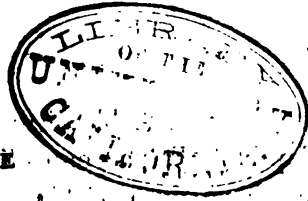
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IT may not be improper to mention, that besides the two Works cited in the first Note in the following ENQUIRY, there is an elegant Treatise, entitled, "Considerations on the Life and Death of JOHN THE BAPTIST;" by Dr. Horne, President of Magdalen College, Oxford; who became Bishop of Norwich. But the object of that Treatise is, to deduce moral and religious reflections from the circumstances and conduct of the BAPTIST; not to suggest any arguments to prove the truth of his Mission.



THE
DIVINE MISSIONS

OF

JOHN THE BAPTIST

AND

JESUS CHRIST.

INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS*.

WHEN we consider, and compare together, those short histories of the life and actions of Jesus Christ, which were written by his chosen disciples, and their fellow labourers in the gospel; the great events, that first engage our attention,

* Whoever is desirous of seeing what may have been written upon this subject before, may consult Dr. Jortin's *Fifth Discourse concerning the truth of the Christian Religion*; entitled, "The Testimony of John the Baptist:" and Part 4. Chap. 5. of a work written originally in French, but translated into English, under the title of, "The Principles of the Christian Religion." These two are the only tracts upon the subject, which the author of the following argument has happened to meet with.

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40 INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS.

says Luke*. And the evangelist John expressly affirms†, that “there was a man sent from God, whose name was John; and that the same came for a witness, to bear witness of the light, that all men through him might believe.”

From all these testimonies it evidently appears, that the chief design of the evangelists was not to make us acquainted with the divine character of the Baptist on his own account; but to complete the evidence of the divine mission of Jesus, by the unexceptionable testimony of that extraordinary prophet, whose appearance in the character of his forerunner had been universally expected, because explicitly foretold.

IN pursuance of this design, it was natural for them to be scrupulously exact in recounting those particulars, by which the prophetic character of John himself was established; and circumstantial in their relations of the testimony he bore to the divine mission of Jesus. But for the rest of John's life and actions, as a minute knowledge of these was not necessary for the chief end in view, they would, of course, only furnish us with their true general idea. Accordingly it will be found, “*And he said unto the multitude, Repent ye towards the Lord, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, that ye may receive remission of sins, and that ye may receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. And he shall baptize you with water in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye may receive the Holy Ghost, which he hath promised unto you. And he shall send him to baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire.*”

* Luke iii. 2—4.

† John i. 6, 7.

“*And he shall send him to baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire.*”

upon comparifon, that the evangelifts have followed this plan. Luke has given a very particular detail*, of all the feemingly miraculous events, which attended John's conception and birth; and which, if they truly came to pafs as related, muft fully prove him to have been fent by a fpecial aét of the divine providence, purpofely to fustain that peculiar prophetic charaéter he afterwards affumed. And, not to cite each evangelift, or have recourfe to every thing they have recorded, what follows will fufficiently prove how defirous they were to confirm the divine authority of Jefus, by the exprefs testimony of John.

“ AND this is the record of John, when the
 “ Jews fent priefts and levites from Jerufalem, to
 “ ask him, who art thou? and he confefled, and
 “ denied not, but confefled, I am not the Chrift.—
 “ I am the voice of one crying in the wildernefs,
 “ make ftraight the way of the Lord, as faid the
 “ prophet Efaias.—I baptize with water; but there
 “ ftandeth one among you, whom ye know not,
 “ he it is, who coming after me, is preferred be-
 “ fore me, whose fhoe's latchet I am not worthy to
 “ unloofe.—The next day John feeth Jefus com-
 “ ing unto him, and faith, behold the lamb of
 “ God, which taketh away the fin of the world.
 “ This is he, of whom I faid, after me cometh

* Luke i. from verfe 5 to 80.

" a man which is preferred before me ; for he was
 " before me. And I knew him not ; but that he
 " should be made manifest to Israel ; therefore am
 " I come baptizing with water. And John bare
 " record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from
 " heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And
 " I knew him not : but he that sent me to baptize
 " with water, the same said unto me, upon whom
 " thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and re-
 " maining on him, the same is he, which bap-
 " tizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and
 " bare record, that this is the son of God. And
 " again, the next day after, John stood, and two
 " of his disciples ; and looking upon Jesus as he
 " walked, he saith, behold the lamb of God. And
 " the two disciples heard him speak, and they fol-
 " lowed Jesus *."

Thus full and particular have the evangelists
 been, in transmitting to us the several proofs of
 the divine character of John the Baptist, and his
 repeated express testimony in confirmation of the
 divine mission of Jesus. But at the same time that
 they were so solicitous to establish the divine
 character of John, and to preserve so many dis-
 tinct positive declarations, publicly delivered by

* John i. from 19 to 37. To the same purpose see Matt.
 iii. 11, &c. Mark i. 7, &c. Luke iii. 15, &c. John i. 15,
 &c. and more especially John iii. 25—36.

him,

him, that Jesus was the true Messiah; they have transmitted to us nothing more of John's transactions, than what was absolutely requisite to give us a true idea of his extraordinary character.

We may venture to conclude then, that the principal intention of Jesus's disciples, in making such mention as they have of John, was, in reality, to establish the divine character of their master, so firmly, upon *his* testimony, "that all men through him might believe." And in this it must at least be confessed, that they acted a very prudent part; since it is impossible for any testimony to be more clear, or more decisive, than that with which the Baptist confirmed the high pretensions of Jesus.

On the other hand, we find Jesus on every opportunity employing all his credit with the people, to persuade them, that John was indeed the very person, which he pretended to be; and the greatest of all the prophets, that had ever appeared among them. The character which the Baptist had from the beginning assumed, was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." And when, upon a particular occasion, he thought fit to send some of his disciples to Jesus, to ask him publicly, whether *He* was the Messiah; Jesus improved the opportunity

8 INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS.

nity this afforded him, to address the people in favour of John; by declaring, in a manner the most emphatical, "that John was a prophet; yea, "I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. "For this is he, of whom it is written, behold I send "my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, "among them that are born of women, there hath "not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.— "And, if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which "was for to come. He that hath ears to hear "let him hear *." Full and frequent as John had been, in witnessing the truth of Jesus's pretensions to the high character of the Messiah; his assertions, we see, were not more express or emphatical, than these declarations of Jesus, in which he publicly affirmed John to be his divine forerunner.

HAD they not thus reciprocally supported each other's claim to divine inspiration, the characters which they each assumed were in themselves so distinct, though relative to each other, that little, perhaps, could have been drawn from them alone, to establish the truth, or detect the falsehood, of their pretensions. Had John only declared himself the forerunner of the Messiah, without pretending to point him out personally to

* Matt. xi. 9, &c.

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the people; and had Jesus left the Jews to judge for themselves, concerning the reality of the Baptist's inspiration; the divine authority of *Both* could not necessarily have been determined by the veracity of *Either*. But since we find them reciprocally bearing testimony to the truth of each other's divine commission; and the disciples of Jesus appear likewise to have given us no farther account of John, than was necessary to avail themselves of his authority, in establishing the credit of their own master; hence we are enabled to draw this certain conclusion; that they must *Both* have been impostors; or *Both*, in reality, those divine personages, whose characters they respectively assumed. And this conclusion, first established, will immediately point out a very natural method to bring the claims of *Both* to a decisive examination.

THEIR mutual endeavours to persuade the people into a belief in each other, must either have been the effect of some supernatural knowledge, which assured them of each other's divine mission; or the result of a previous agreement between them, to support their double imposture. The nature of the case will not admit us to suppose, that Jesus may have been the true Messiah, but John an impostor; or John, *that* prophet, he declared himself, but Jesus a deceiver. Their
claims

claims to any thing divine must now stand or fall together.

HAD either of them alone been a counterfeit; the true prophet, it must be allowed, could not have borne witness in his favour; unless the other had found means to deceive him into a firm belief of his pretensions. As the real messenger of the God of truth could not be sent into the world to support a lie; so it was impossible for him knowingly to abett the designs of an infamous deceiver.

If then only *One* of them was really the divine person he pretended to be, nothing can account for his conduct in supporting the *Other*, but his having been deluded by him into an opinion, that *that* divine character did truly belong to him, which he had impiously assumed. But this supposition cannot be admitted in the present case.

THE appearance of the long promised Messiah was an event of such importance to the general happiness of mankind, and in which, the goodness, veracity, and justice of God were so intimately concerned, that *He* could not be sent into the world, in such a manner, as would lay mankind under an absolute necessity to disown and reject him, without the least fault in themselves. The divine wisdom could not therefore send that inspired messenger, whom he had long promised,
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purposely to prepare the Messiah's way before him; without enlightening *him* with that ample portion of his discerning spirit, which would enable him to distinguish the true Messiah, without a possibility of mistake, from every counterfeit of his character; or at least secure him from bearing witness to any impostor. Had he been sent without this necessary qualification, instead of preparing the Messiah's way before him, he might, and in the present case must, have been the most effectual obstructor of it. He might involuntarily have misapplied his divine authority, in abetting the designs of an impious deceiver; and thus have thwarted those eternal counsels he was sent purposely to fulfill, through the defects of his own inspiration.

SUPPOSING then that the Baptist was, in fact, the divine messenger in question; Jesus must likewise have been the true Messiah.

ON the other hand, should we allow Jesus to have been the long expected Messiah; his testimony will furnish us with as satisfactory a proof of the divine authority of John. Nothing can be more evidently absurd, than to suppose, that a being of consummate wisdom and power, would render the authority of his divine inspirations liable to be brought into question, by being connected with the short-sighted and inconsistent schemes

schemes of human imposture. Intricate plans of deceit, especially such as affect the general interests of mankind, and are of the most extensive nature, are ever liable to be discovered. Nor have we need of any other reason for rejecting all pretenders to divine authority, than the finding them desirous to encrease their credit by the assistance of a deceiver. Jesus, therefore, if he was the true Messiah, must unquestionably have distinguished the true Elias, from every counterfeit, who might assume his name: or, at least, he must have refrained from bearing witness to any one whom he did not infallibly know to be the divine person in question.

BESIDES, had the Baptist alone been the counterfeit, as Jesus must then have been preceded by *some truly* divine forerunner, to whom the character which John assumed did really belong; Jesus would undoubtedly have appealed to the testimony of *that true* prophet, if to any, instead of the false; and we could never have found him endeavouring to establish the credit of John.

It is evident therefore beyond question, that if we admit the divine mission of Jesus, his testimony will oblige us also to acknowledge the inspiration of John. And thus the evidence they have borne to the truth of each other's divine pretensions reduces us to the necessity of rejecting them

them *Both* as impostors ; or submitting to *Both* in those very characters they assumed, as the special messengers of God, and immediate revealers of his will to mankind.

• THIS indissoluble connection between Jesus and the Baptist, naturally points out a particular method of establishing the truth and certainty of the Christian revelation ; in its own nature, strong and conclusive ; and independent of all that variety of other arguments by which its divine original may be clearly proved. If those particulars, which the evangelists have recorded, relating to John's birth and transactions, and such others concerning Jesus as are necessarily connected with them, will enable us to shew satisfactorily, that the Baptist himself could not be an impostor ; then will they afford a complete and equally satisfactory proof of the divine mission of Jesus ; since it will then be certain, that he could be no less than what John declared him to be, the promised Messiah, and the Son of God.

THE prosecution of this particular point is the first and more immediate object of the following enquiry. But, as we proceed in it, the argument will likewise be found attended with this farther, and very material advantage ; that in illustrating the evidence of the divine original of John, we shall at the same time unavoidably trace out a separate,

parate, direct, and equally full proof of the divine character of Jesus ; drawn from the nature of those particulars which relate immediately to himself alone.

THE chief of those materials, which must serve for the foundation of this enquiry, are but few in number, and little more than a series of astonishing events, affirmed to have accompanied both the Baptist's and Jesus's birth. But these, when considered in their several circumstances, and necessary connections ; and when joined likewise with some remarkable particulars in the conduct of John and Jesus towards each other, which must greatly contribute to their farther illustration ; will appear, it is hoped, fully sufficient to answer the end proposed ; and afford us a proof, at least, as satisfactory as in such a point can rationally be desired, that John was indeed a man sent from God, and Jesus beyond all doubt the true Messiah.

THE
DIVINE MISSIONS
OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST
AND
JESUS CHRIST.

PART I.

SECTION I.

The miraculous events recorded of the birth and circumcision of John the Baptist cannot have been forged, either by Jesus, or any of his disciples; or by John himself, or any of his disciples.

THE several miraculous events reported to have accompanied the conception of John the Baptist, are related by Luke as follows * :

“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias,

* Luke i. 5—25.

“ of the course of Abia: and his wife was of
“ the daughters of Aaron, and her name was
“ Elizabeth. And they were both righteous be-
“ fore God, walking in all the commandments
“ and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And
“ they had no child, because that Elizabeth was
“ barren, and they both were now well stricken in
“ years. And it came to pass, that, while he
“ executed the priest's office before God, in the
“ order of his course, according to the custom
“ of the priest's office, his lot was to burn
“ incense, when he went into the temple of the
“ Lord. And the whole multitude of the people
“ were praying without at the time of incense.
“ And there appeared unto him an angel of
“ the Lord, standing on the right side of the
“ altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him,
“ he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But
“ the angel said unto him, fear not, Zacharias:
“ for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth
“ shall bear thee a Son, and thou shalt call his
“ name John. And thou shalt have joy and glad-
“ ness, and many shall rejoice at his birth. For
“ he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and
“ shall drink neither wine, nor strong drink;
“ and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost,
“ even from his mother's womb. And many of
“ the children of Israel shall be turn to the Lord
“ their

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“ their God. And he shall go before him in the
 “ spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the
 “ fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the
 “ wisdom of the just, to make ready a people pre-
 “ pared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto
 “ the angel, whereby shall I know this? for I am
 “ an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.
 “ And the angel answering said unto him, I am
 “ Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and
 “ am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these
 “ glad tidings. And behold, thou shalt be dumb,
 “ and not able to speak, until the day that these
 “ things shall be performed; because thou believest
 “ not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their
 “ season. And the people waited for Zacharias,
 “ and marvelled that he staid so long in the temple.
 “ And when he came out he could not speak unto
 “ them: and they perceived that he had seen a
 “ vision in the temple; for he beckoned unto them
 “ and remained speechless. And it came to pass,
 “ that as soon as the days of his ministration were
 “ accomplished, he departed to his own house.
 “ And after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived,
 “ and hid herself five months, saying, thus hath the
 “ Lord dealt with me, to take away my reproach
 “ among men.”

THE evangelist, having thus related the circumstances of John's conception, stops here to give

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an account of many other events, no less astonishing, which soon after accompanied the conception of Jesus ; and then goes on with the following history of the birth of the Baptist *.

“ Now Elizabeth’s full time came, that she
 “ should be delivered, and she brought forth a
 “ son. And her neighbours, and her cousins,
 “ heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy
 “ upon her, and they rejoiced with her. And
 “ it came to pass, that on the eighth day they
 “ came to circumcise the child, and they called
 “ him Zacharias, after the name of his father.
 “ And his mother answered, and said, not so ;
 “ but he shall be called John. And they said
 “ unto her, there is none of thy kindred that is
 “ called by this name. And they made signs to
 “ his father, how he would have him called. And
 “ he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying,
 “ his name is John. And they marvelled all. And
 “ his mouth was opened immediately, and his
 “ tongue loosed, and he spake and praised God.
 “ And fear came on all that dwelt round about
 “ them ; and all these sayings were noised abroad,
 “ throughout all the hill country of Judea. And
 “ all they, that had heard them, laid them up in
 “ their hearts, saying, what manner of child shall
 “ this be ? And the hand of the Lord was with

* Luke i. 57—to the end.

“ him.

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“ him. And his father Zacharias was filled with
“ the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed
“ be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited
“ and redeemed his people; and hath raised up
“ an horn of salvation for us, in the house of his
“ servant David, as he spake by the mouth of his
“ holy prophets, which have been since the world
“ began. That we should be saved from our ene-
“ mies, and from the hand of all that hate us. To
“ perform the mercy promised to our forefathers,
“ and to remember his holy covenant; the oath
“ which he swore to our father Abraham; that he
“ would grant unto us, that we, being delivered
“ out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him
“ without fear, in holiness and righteousness before
“ him all the days of our life. And thou, child,
“ shalt be called the prophet of the Highest;
“ for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to
“ prepare his way, to give knowledge of salvation
“ to his people, by the remission of their sins;
“ through the tender mercy of our God; whereby
“ the day spring from on high hath visited us, to
“ give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the
“ shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way
“ of peace.—And the child grew, and waxed strong
“ in spirit, and was in the deserts until the day of
“ his shewing unto Israel.”

SUCH, and so astonishing, are the particulars transmitted to us of the conception and birth of John the Baptist. The evangelist himself, by his manner of relating them, seems to have thought they contained evidence fully sufficient to convince mankind of the truth of his prophetic character, and divine inspiration. And if these accounts may be relied on as true histories of facts, which actually came to pass, in the manner they are related; it must at once be confessed, that their testimony is abundantly sufficient to assure us of John's divine mission; and there can be no room to doubt whether Jesus was the true Messiah.

THE appearance of an angel to Zacharias; his prophetic declaration, that things in the highest degree improbable would very shortly be brought to pass; his punishing Zacharias, by striking him instantaneously dumb, for questioning the truth of what he foretold; the subsequent conception and birth of John, at a time when, humanly speaking, Elizabeth could not have had children; the sudden restoration of Zacharias's speech, at the period when the angel declared it would be restored to him; and his breaking-out into prophecies the instant after, through the force of divine inspiration; these events, considered together, are so apparently beyond the power of human

human artifice to accomplish, that, if it be allowed they really came to pass, all farther argument is at an end. The Baptist must at once be submitted to as the true Elias; and Jesus, upon his repeated testimony, be acknowledged the Son of God.

THIS then is the question; Whether we have sufficient reason to satisfy us, in a point of so great importance, that this relation of the evangelists is free both from imposture and mistake; and that all the facts contained in it are unquestionably true*?

IF this miraculous history of the birth of John is not to be relied on, as a true account of what did actually happen; it must either have been in-

* Before we enter upon the argument proposed, it seems necessary to premise, that it is not here intended to prove, that the gospels were really written by those persons, whose names they bear; but taking this *single* point for granted, as having been fully established by those, who have written professedly upon it; the design of this inquiry is to prove, that the facts in question, recorded in the gospels, could not possibly be forged; but must really have come to pass, in the manner that they are there related. And this, not by arguing from any supposed authority of the evangelists, but from the very nature and circumstances of their relations themselves.—The authenticity of the gospels may be seen proved at large by *Lardner*, in his *Cred. of the Gosp. Hist.*; and others, who have set themselves expressly to examine the canon of the New Testament.

vented by *Luke*, or *some other of Jesus's apostles*, in order to strengthen the credit of their own master;—or it must have been forged by *John himself*, or *some of his disciples*, to deceive the people into a belief of his divine inspiration; or lastly, it must have been a contrivance of *Zacharias and his associates*, in order to pass his Son upon the Jews for that honourable prophet, who was expected to come before-hand to prepare the way of the Lord.

Now that it could not be forged by *Luke*, will very evidently appear. Though the exact time of the publication of his gospel is unknown, nor is it certain whether it came abroad before or after those of Matthew and Mark, the nature and end of the work itself, and Luke's own words, oblige us to acknowledge, that it could not be made public immediately after the death of Christ. Till the church was so enlarged, that the personal testimony of the apostles, and the eye-witnesses of Jesus's life and actions, could not often be had; and their verbal accounts, through a course of some time, were exposed to the danger of being, even involuntarily, corrupted; the evangelists were under no great necessity to write histories of the life of Jesus their master; and were much too fully employed in making converts to christianity, to have leisure for composing them. In fact,
Luke

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Luke himself has expressly declared *, that he did not compose his gospel, till after " many had taken " in hand to set forth, in order, a declaration of " those things, which were most assuredly believed " among them." This declaration, especially when joined to the nature of the thing itself, would make it in the highest degree unreasonable to suppose, that the gospel in question could have come abroad, till some considerable time after the death of Christ. And thus far all the different opinions about it are agreed.

BUT after such a time had elapsed, the evangelist could not but know and consider, that it would be impossible for him to forge a series of facts, so astonishing in themselves, and of such considerable moment, without being immediately detected; and ruining at once the prevailing credit of Jesus, and all who preached in his name. Could the apostles, from the first of their ministry, have appealed to so wonderful a series of events, which had accompanied the birth of John; no man could possibly believe, that they would till this time have studiously suppressed them; or could, through neglect, have forgot to relate them. For John, we have seen bore the most express testimony to the truth of Jesus's pretensions; and

* Luke i. 1.

we know likewise, that all the people held John to have been a prophet indeed.

THE evangelist therefore could not possibly have prefixed a relation so astonishing, as this history of the birth of John, to his account of the life and actions of Jesus ; unless the particulars contained in it had not only been publicly *known* and *believed*, before he wrote ; but publicly *taught* likewise, by all the apostles, to every convert they had made, from their first beginning to preach the gospel. Because it was evident, that, if he *had*, not only his own gospel, but, with it, all the pretences of his party, must, *on this very account*, have been universally exploded.

NEITHER can this relation have been a forgery concerted between *all or any of Jesus's disciples*, at their very first beginning to preach the gospel, after Jesus's death. Such a surprising series of miracles supposed to have accompanied John's *birth*, but never made known till so long a time after his *death* * ; and then first reported by a set of men, whose interest was so nearly and so evidently con-

* According to Mr. Macknight, John was beheaded before the third passover of Jesus's public ministry ; and Jesus himself was put to death at the fifth. So that the death of Jesus did not happen till full two years after the death of John. Some computations make the distance greater still ; and it could not be less,

cerned in promoting the belief of them; must necessarily have carried with it so strong an appearance of imposture, that those, who did not reject them at once, as apparently fictitious, would no doubt have examined into the truth of them, with so much scrupulous care, that, had they not been founded on unquestionable fact, their falsehood must have been presently detected.

How zealous and active the rulers of the Jews, and the whole synagogue continued, for a long time after they had put Jesus to death, in endeavouring to silence the apostles, and prevent even the name of Jesus from being named among the people, is well known. At the very time, when the apostles must have first published these forgeries concerning the birth of John; if in reality they were forgeries, and the apostles the persons who forged them; the chief priests and rulers were watching every opportunity to destroy them. First, they imprisoned Peter and John*; then all the apostles at once†; not dismissing them without stripes, and threats of the severest punishment if they still continued preaching in Jesus's name‡; and, very soon after, they even put Stephen to death§. So circumstanced, in the midst

* Acts of the apost. iv. 1—3.

† Acts of the apost. v. 17, 18.

‡ Acts of the apost. iv. 18, 21.—v. 28, 40.

§ Ibid. vii. 58, 59, 60.

of such persecuting foes, what can be more incredible, than that the apostles should voluntarily court not only the utter extinction of their Master's credit, but even their own shame and destruction; by now first publishing so extravagant and ill-founded a forgery, as must necessarily make their veracity not suspected only, but exploded, by every one of the least judgement or reflection?

Or, were it conceivable, that the apostles themselves could act so foolish a part; how can it be believed, that the chief priests and rulers would quietly acquiesce, in suffering them to spread abroad these hitherto unheard-of divine revelations; so evidently calculated to raise the credit of Jesus; whose name and memory *they* were at this very time exerting all their authority to destroy? Had the circumstances of John's birth, which Luke has related, been unknown till this time, and now first published by Jesus's disciples; the sanhedrim could not have failed to make the strictest enquiry into the evidence alleged in their support; and if that had proved insufficient, as it certainly must, would have punished the apostles to the utmost extent of their power; and by laying open their villainy to the public view, have extinguished for ever the growing credit of the sect.

SINCE therefore, on the contrary, it appears, that though they not only threatened, but beat,
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and imprisoned the apostles; and even put one of them to death, for persisting to preach in the name of Jesus; yet they never accused them of the least forgery, in those miraculous accounts of the birth of the Baptist, which they were now every where spreading among their converts to Christianity; we are necessitated to acknowledge, that this account of the birth of John, which Luke has recorded, must have been publicly known, and universally believed before the time of Jesus's death. It could not therefore be forged by the apostles, when they first began to preach the gospel, immediately after it.

IF then the miraculous account under consideration was forged by Jesus's disciples, Jesus himself must have been concerned with them in it, and they must jointly have published it soon after the death of John. But not to repeat arguments, which have been but this moment alleged; the very same reasons, which have shewn it impossible for Jesus's disciples to have done this, soon after *his* death; prove it equally certain, that neither could Jesus, in conjunction with them, have first published such a forgery, at any time after the death of John. Because the testimony of Jesus more especially, with that of his disciples, would necessarily have been exposed to all the same objections in this case, as the testimony of his disciples alone, in the former.

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SINCE therefore this account of the miraculous birth of John, whether we suppose it true or false, must have been publicly known and received, while John himself was alive to confirm or contradict it; if it was a forgery, we must next suppose John himself to have been the true author, and chief propagator of it. But neither could this possibly be the case.

JOHN'S whole character, life, and doctrine, were so eminently distinguished by a religious adherence to the very strictest rules of piety and virtue; that, according to Josephus, the Jews in general were firmly persuaded, that particular divine judgements were inflicted upon Herod for putting him to death *. But, not to insist on this, the

* Josephus having related the total defeat of Herod's army, and mentioned the cause of it, that they were betrayed by some deserters, goes on as follows.

Τίσι δὲ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἔδοκει ὀλωλεῖναι τὸν Ἡρώδη τράλιν ὅτε τὸ Θεοῦ, καὶ μαλὰ δικαίως τιτυμένῃ κατὰ ποίησιν Ἰωάννη τῷ ἐπικαλημένῳ Βαπτιστῇ· κτείνει γὰρ τέλειον Ἡρώδης, ἀγαθὸν ἀνδρα, καὶ τῆς Ἰουδαίας κελευσίᾳ, ἀρετὴν ἐπασκουσίας, καὶ τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλους δικαιοσύνῃ, καὶ πρὸς τὸν Θεοῦ εὐσεβείᾳ χρωμένους, βαπτισμῷ συνιέναι· ἔτο γὰρ καὶ τὴν βαπτισίαν ἀποδεκτὴν αὐτῷ φανείσθαι, μὴ ἐπὶ τινῶν ἁμαρτιῶν παρὰ τὴν εὐσέβειαν, ἀλλ' ἐφ' ἀγνείᾳ τοῦ σώματος, ἅτε δὴ καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς δικαιοσύνην πρὸς ἐκκαθάρασθαι. — Joseph. Antiq. Jud. L. 18. 5. Ed. Haverc.

“ But many among the Jews were persuaded, that the destruction of Herod's army was owing to the particular interposition of God; who, they thought, took this method to
punish

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the several particulars related are of such a nature, as prove beyond contradiction, that these accounts could not have been first invented, nor even first related, at any time after John's birth; and consequently, that it is impossible for John himself, or any of his disciples, to have been the contriver, or first propagator of them.

ZACHARIAS'S seeming loss of speech, and his signifying to the people his having seen a vision in the temple, were facts, that, if true, must have been notorious to great numbers; as is evident from the occasion on which they are said to have happened *. Again, Zacharias's no less surpris-

punish him, as he very highly deserved, for his cruelty to *John*, commonly called the *Baptist*. For Herod had put him to death, notwithstanding he was a good man, and exhorted the Jews not to come to his baptism, without first preparing themselves for it, by the practice of virtue; by a strict adherence to the rules of justice and equity in their dealings with one another; and by manifesting a sincere piety towards God. For their being baptized, he taught them, would then only be acceptable to God, when, having first purified the mind with righteous dispositions, they had recourse to baptism, as nothing more than an emblem of their freedom from sensual pollutions; not when they made use of it as a commutation for their sins."

* "And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that " that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came " out he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that " he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto " them, and remained speechless." Luke i. 21, 22.

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ing, instantaneous recovery of his speech, at the time of John's circumcision, was another fact, which, if true, must have been known likewise at the very time, to no less than *ten* several relations of the family who, according to the constant custom of the Jewish nation, must have been present upon that occasion *.

Now it is inconceivable, that an impostor should choose to forge such facts as these, the falsehood of which might presently be detected; and add likewise, that the whole country round about was, at the very time, made acquainted with, and surprised at them; when, if the facts

* The occasion was the circumcision of John. "And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father, &c." Luke i. 59.—Upon this occasion the custom of the Jews was as follows.

"Upon the day of circumcision the father makes a feast. *Ten* must be the number of the invited guests; and one or two of the learned Rabbis make a long prayer and sermon at the table; while the others freely set the glass about and drink plentifully. This feast they observe, by the example of Abraham, who made a great feast, the same day that Isaac was weaned (Gen. xxi. 8.): they pervert the text, and say, *when he was circumcised.*" Lewis's Heb. Antiqu. B. 4. Ch. 1.

The number of persons to be invited to this feast, at the circumcision, was not limited to *ten*; but there were always to be *ten at the least*. Buxtorf. Syn. Jud. cap. 2.

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themselves were not true, it would immediately have appeared, upon enquiry, that none of the neighbouring inhabitants had ever heard any thing of them. * “ And fear came on all that dwelt round about them ; and all these sayings (*that is, all these transactions* †) were noised abroad, throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all that heard them laid them up in their hearts,

* Luke i. 65, 66.

† To prevent any suspicion of having interpreted this passage in a more comprehensive sense, than it ought to be taken in ; it is proper to observe, that the words in the original are, *παντα τα ρηματα ταυτα* ; which in the translation are rendered “ all these sayings.” Now it is certain, that *τα ρηματα* signifies indifferently *things* as well as *words* ; and is as often used for the former as the latter. Thus in this very chapter, ver. 37. *Οτι ουκ αδυνατησι παρα το Θεω παν ρημα* ; in the translation, “ For with God nothing shall be impossible.” And in chap. ii. 15. *Διελθωμεν δη εως Βηθλεεμ, και ιδωμεν το ρημα τουντο το γεγονος, ο ο Κυριος εγγορισεν ημιν.* “ Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see *this thing* which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.” From these instances only it is sufficiently plain, that in the passage before us, *παντα τα ρηματα ταυτα*, would have been more properly translated, “ all these events ;” instead of, “ all these sayings ;” and that Luke meant by them, not only Zacharias’s prophetic declaration, but all the facts he had just been relating. See more on the word *ρημα* in Hamm. on Matt. 2.—Wolf. Cur. Phil. in Luc. i. 37.—Gataker de Stylo N. T. p. 146. Rofs’s Essay for a new Transl. (from Le Cene), p. 2. ch. 4.

“ saying,

“saying, what manner of child shall this be?” Unless these events had apparently come to pass, in the manner, and at the time, they are related to have happened; they could not at that time have been noised abroad through the neighbouring country; nor could John himself, or his associates, at any time afterwards have ventured to assert that they were.

THE nature of the facts themselves was so surprising, that upon this account alone, some remembrance of them must have been preserved, in the neighbourhood where Zacharias had lived, had they really happened, much later than it was possible for John himself, or any of his disciples while he was living, to have contrived and published these accounts. The history of so many divine revelations, reflecting so much honour upon all those to whom they had been made, must without doubt have been preserved in the family, with great care, at least as long as the person, whom they immediately concerned, was alive. The hopes and expectations of seeing them accomplished in John's future life and actions, must have kept them in the remembrance of Zacharias's friends and relations at least; and rendered it impossible for the memory of them to have been lost, while there was a possibility remaining of seeing them one day fulfilled.

No

No sooner, it is related, had Zacharias signified that his son should be named John, than his speech was perfectly restored, and he was immediately filled with the Holy Ghost, or at least pretended to be so, and prophesied : foretelling, besides the speedy coming of the Messiah himself, and the glories of his reign, that *his own son*, at that time but a few days old, was sent to discharge the office of his immediate forerunner.

So unexpected a prediction, delivered by Zacharias, after having been, as he pretended, for so long a time miraculously struck dumb, and but the instant before as miraculously restored to speech ; and this too concerning a child born to him when he could have no hopes of children ; and to whom he had just given a name, in opposition to the desire of all his relations present, and the prevailing custom of his country ; such a prophecy, pronounced in circumstances so remarkable, and full of promises so desirable, could not have been forgot in John's life-time, had it really been delivered ; nor could John's affirming such a story have been able to procure it belief, if it had not been remembered.

If therefore, upon enquiry, when John assumed his public character, no account, not even the least tradition, of these miracles and prophecies could be learned from the family of Zacharias,

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and the neighbourhood* where he lived; and if they were forgeries of John's own, or any of his disciples, it is evident this must have been the case; they must at once have been effectually exploded. John's own reputation must have been absolutely blasted; nor would the historians of Jesus have dared afterwards to publish these relations, in order to support the credit of their Master. On the contrary, it must have been their desire, by all means, totally to suppress all memory of them; since any known falsehood in John must so necessarily bring the credit of Jesus into question. Not to say, that in this case it would have been impossible for the credit of Jesus to have outlived that of John.

* It may not be improper to take notice, on this occasion, that the Jews were from the beginning settled in their possessions, according to their tribes and families (See M. Lowman's Civil Government of the Hebrews, ch. 4.). By this means a whole neighbourhood, being in some measure related to each other, must have been more nearly connected, than in other countries; where no such regulation had originally taken place; and their tribes were not kept distinct. And, on this account, it must have been looked on as still more highly incredible, that the neighbourhood, where Zacharias had lived, could at this time be found absolutely ignorant of any such astonishing events as those before us; had they ever really come to pass, and been related among them.

BUT

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BUT besides this conclusive argument, drawn from the several circumstances attending the supposed revelations themselves ; it appears, on many other accounts, absolutely impossible for them to have been forged by John himself, or consequently by his disciples.

It must at once be allowed, that before he could contrive, or enter upon a design so intricate, so bold, and so iniquitous, he must, at least, be drawing very near to man's estate. This is the very earliest period we can possibly assign for it. He could not then begin to publish these stories, in order to prepare people for receiving him, in that divine character, which he must have intended afterwards to assume, till he was at least about twenty years of age. Now, at this time either Zacharias and Elizabeth, and all the ten persons who had been present at the feast of John's circumcision, about twenty years before, must have been still alive ;—or else only some of them were yet living ;—or lastly, they must all have been already dead. And which ever of these suppositions we may choose to embrace, it will be found incredible, that John could attempt setting on foot such an imposture, at this time ; or, if he had attempted it, that he could have escaped immediate and public detection.

If Zacharias and Elizabeth, and all those who had been present at their son's circumcision, were yet alive; it is evident, that John could not attempt to publish any forgeries of his own, giving an account of such remarkable revelations, as having been made to all of them, so many years before; unless he had first seduced them all to corroborate his relation, with their own evidence; and conspire with him in the prosecution of the whole plot.

BUT what an extravagant and incredible supposition is this! Was it possible for John to entertain a design of engaging his very parents themselves, persons of such virtuous conversation as he knew them to be, in so wicked an imposture? Could he conceive hopes, that they, who, he well knew, had ever walked "in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless*," would

* As it is not allowable here to take the good character of Zacharias and Elizabeth upon trust, it is necessary to observe, that the circumstances of the case will prove the characters given of them to be true; without considering Luke's relation as of any authority, on his own account.—It has just now been proved, that if the circumstances of John's birth, related by Luke, had been forged; they could not, however, be forged, and first made known, either by Luke himself, or any of Jesus's disciples, after the death of Jesus; or by Jesus, in conjunction with his own, or John's disciples, after John's death.

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would encourage, and even assist him, in the most impious of all undertakings? Or could he imagine,

death. This being the case, it necessarily follows, that the particulars concerned, even if they were forged, must have been made known, at the latest, while John was yet alive. It is evident likewise, that these particulars were of so marvellous a nature, that, whenever they were first related, they would undoubtedly cause many, and the chief priests more especially, to recollect, or enquire into, the received characters of Zacharias and Elizabeth; who were represented as so intimately concerned in them. And as this, we have seen, must have been while John was yet alive; and consequently, long before the received characters of Zacharias and Elizabeth could be forgot, in the neighbourhood where they had lived; hence it appears, that the reputation they had *really* maintained, whether good or bad, must have been so well known and established during the public ministry of John, that it could not be in the power of Luke to attribute a *false* character to them, and above all, one so remarkably good, when he came to write his gospel some years afterwards.—Besides, it would be manifestly absurd to suppose, that the people in general, or the chief priests in particular, should not enquire who John was, and from what parents he arose; when first he began to baptize, and drew all orders about him. Curiosity alone would lead the generality to make this enquiry; and the chief priests must have done it on other motives. Nor could they possibly remain ignorant of the true characters of Zacharias and Elizabeth; since all the other priests, who had lived in the same neighbourhood with them, must certainly have known very well, what reputation they had in fact maintained; and were the very persons, to whom the

gine, that among no less than ten of his father's select friends, and two Rabbis, whom he had chosen to rejoice with him, at the feast for the circumcision of an unexpected son, there should not be one, who should have common honesty enough to refuse becoming an accomplice in so wicked a conspiracy? Nothing can farther exceed the bounds of credibility, than this supposition would; except what we must at the same time suppose, in order to convict John of the forgery in debate; that he not only determined to attempt corrupting them, but actually succeeded.

THOUGH the evangelists have given us no account of those persons who were present at the Baptist's circumcision; the occasion of the meeting itself is sufficient to convince us, that they must certainly have been persons of good moral characters, and virtuous reputations. Zacharias called them together, in compliance with the custom of his country, to rejoice with him for

chief priests and rulers would have applied, for information about them.—On both these accounts therefore it must be allowed, that that exemplary character, which Luke has without scruple ascribed to Zacharias and Elizabeth, could be no other, than what had always been admitted as their *true* character; but more especially from the time when John began first to baptize; at which time, it is certain, no false account of them would have been suffered by the chief priests to gain ground.

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the birth of a son, born after he had lost all hopes of having children. This was an event, which must have given so much pleasure to Zacharias, and more especially to Elizabeth *, that it cannot be doubted, but they would certainly invite such of their most intimate friends to rejoice with them upon it, as would render the family meeting as satisfactory as possible. Whoever they were then, that met to rejoice with Zacharias upon this occasion, they could not be any of his mere common acquaintance; persons whose lives and conversations he might know but little of, and be as little solicitous about; but, on the contrary, they must have been such of his best friends and relations, as he knew would take part most sincerely in his present satisfaction.

Now from hence it is certain, that they must have been persons of integrity, and unblemished reputation. For how can it be imagined, that a priest, who had maintained to old age an exemplary character, could have formed his most intimate connections with persons of abandoned principles, and dissolute lives? How is it possible he should have formed friendships, and kept up an intimate correspondence, with those, whose company would have been a disgrace to his pro-

* See Luke i. 24, 25.

feſſion, and whoſe conduct muſt have been oppoſite to his own? Had he conducted himſelf in this manner, he could neither have acquired, nor preſerved, that virtuous reputation, which he died poſſeſſed of. He was now likewiſe arrived at that advanced time of life, when other cauſes of intimacy loſe their influence, and good men value their friends, more than ever, for the internal diſpoſition and good principles of the heart. Thoſe friends therefore, whom Zacharias ſelected to rejoice with him upon this occaſion, we may reſt ſatisfied, muſt have been, like himſelf and Elizabeth, perſons of approved probity and worth.

WHAT then can be more incredible, than that John ſhould imagine he could prevail with no leſs than *twelve* perſons, of ſuch worthy characters as his parents and their friends certainly were, to become, all on the ſudden, extravagantly wicked, and aſſiſt him in the proſecution of a moſt impious impoſture? And even had it been poſſible for him to have reſolved upon attempting this, by what ſtrange fatality could it happen, that they ſhould all, without exception, approve his wicked deſigns, and all become at once ſo hardened in iniquity, that neither the cuſtomary ſtings of remorse, nor even the ſeverer terrors of a death-bed, ſhould induce any one of them, ever after, to make confeſſion of his crime? No expedients

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pedients whatever can render such suppositions even in the very lowest degree credible, or capable of being allowed.

AND what views of advantage could John have to propose to his parents and relations, in order to engage them in so iniquitous an undertaking; which, on so many other accounts, it must have appeared to him plainly impossible for them to approve? Some surely he must have thought necessary for this end; and yet his design, planned as we must suppose him to have planned it, could not admit of any.

THE prophecies and revelations which they attested, and which must either have been his contrivance alone, or the joint produce of all, were such as would at all times have made it requisite for *him* to refuse all earthly power and honours. He was to be *great* indeed*; but then it was to be *in the fight of the Lord*, not of man. His life and manners were to be distinguished from those of other men; but, instead of being rendered remarkable by a more splendid possession of human enjoyments; “he was to drink neither wine nor “strong drink;” and to live in a continued course of abstinence and mortification. He was to assume the character of an instructor of man-

* Luke i. 15.

kind;

kind; but, far from being to possess the allurements of human wisdom and philosophy, "he was "to be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb." He was to preach the doctrine of repentance; of all others the most directly calculated to draw upon him a general hatred and aversion; and, "to give knowledge of salvation by the "remission of their sins" to THAT people, who valued themselves so highly on being the sons of Abraham. In fine, he was professedly to renounce the high character of the Messiah; and to lay claim to no other honour, than that of a messenger, who was to prepare his way before him, in the reserved and retired manner of Elias.

THIS being the plot he contrived; if it was indeed a plot of his own contrivance; what rewards could he possibly propose to Zacharias and Elizabeth, and their friends, sufficient to induce them to embark in so iniquitous an imposture? It is evident he could have none to offer. And to suppose, notwithstanding, that he could think it possible, that so many persons of virtuous reputation should all agree to join in carrying on so wicked, and, at the same time, so useless a design; and, in consequence of this opinion, that he could attempt to seduce them; and farther, that, in fact, they all heartily embraced it, and ever after adhered to it; would be contradicting the first principles

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ciples of common sense, and all experience; and utterly confounding all distinction between falsehood and truth.

BUT, incredible as the supposition must undoubtedly be allowed, let us suppose these twelve persons, of unblemished integrity, to have become, all at once, the most accomplished impostors. Even this concession itself will not yet make it possible for the imposture in debate to have been first contrived, and thus set on foot by the Baptist. For, had it been his contrivance, even the joint testimony of *all these* in its support would have been utterly insufficient to prevent it from being presently exploded.

IT has been already observed, that John must at least have arrived at man's estate, before he can be conceived capable of entering upon such a design. So that, whatever associates he might then engage in it, must *till that time* have been totally ignorant of every particular of the plot; and, consequently, could never have made mention of any of these divine revelations, as having accompanied the birth of John, during the long interval of about twenty years, which must have elapsed since he was born. But after such a silence as this, had they all agreed to publish relations of any such miraculous events; it cannot be doubted, what must have been the success of so foolish an attempt

attempt to impose upon the common sense of mankind.

Who could possibly have given credit to stories of so extraordinary a nature ; which, if related at the very first, required to have been so well attested ; when it should appear, that not one of those witnesses, upon whose testimony only they must stand or fall, had ever made the least mention of them, for such a series of years ? It would have been utterly impossible for any of them, and more especially for Zacharias, to account satisfactorily for their entirely suppressing such events, at the time they came to pass ; when astonishment alone would have led every honest undesigning spectator to reveal them ; as well as for making them known at last, when they were plainly calculated to serve an interested view, after having so long suppressed them. Such a conduct, it must have been clear to all, could have proceeded from nothing less than some dishonest agreement between them ; and, consequently, must have deprived their testimony of all regard, however credible witnesses they might otherwise have been.

WHAT more natural, nay, what more unavoidable, than this enquiry ; how so many honest men could have agreed among themselves, absolutely to suppress *such* extraordinary revelations of the will

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will of God, as, according to their own account of them, it was of the utmost importance, should be published to mankind? "He shall be great," said the angel to Zacharias, "in the sight of the Lord;— and many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him, in the spirit and power of Elias; to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord*." Zacharias himself too prophesied, "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people, by the remission of their sins†." These were dispensations, which, the most simple could not but at once perceive, required the proofs of John's divine commission to be published to mankind. It must therefore have occurred to every one, that whoever could agree among themselves to suppress those miraculous events, by which alone these dispensations could be confirmed, must have been persons of no less abandoned principles, than such as could deliberately combine together, to oppose the merciful dispensations of God, and

* Luke i. 15, 17.

† Ibid. i. 76, 77.

obstruct the universal happiness of man. So that, had it been possible for John himself to have entered upon, and engaged his parents and relations in so foolish a design, their long unavoidable silence, with regard to all these astonishing events, which they must now at length have attested, was abundantly sufficient to prevent any one from paying the least regard to their reports *.

ABOVE all the rest; the credit of Zacharias and Elizabeth, though hitherto unsuspected, must on this account have been effectually destroyed. For every honest motive, that could possibly influence their conduct upon such an occasion, would have conspired together, in forcing them to publish these divine revelations, had they ever really been made. If he was a man of probity and virtue, he could not have resolved to conceal from mankind such singular manifestations of the over-ruling providence of God. If a priest of piety and religion, he could not have dared to withhold from

* Nay, their testimony would not only have been rejected on all these accounts; but their characters would unavoidably have become infamous, in the judgement of all the people. For, among the Jews, all such as concealed any revelations, that had been made to them, were looked upon as one particular species of *false prophets*; and they believed that God would execute severe judgement upon them, as such.—See Selden de Synedr. Eb. l. 2. c. 6. And Lewis's Heb. Antiq. B. 2. 16.

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his whole nation those divine revelations concerning his own son; the very substance of which evidently shewed, that God certainly designed them to be made known to all. As a descendant of Abraham, and an inheritor of the promises made to his forefathers, he could not but have been extremely desirous to be the first publisher of the joyful tidings of the long-expected Messiah; he could not but have rejoiced exceedingly at the high honour conferred upon himself, in blessing him with a son to be the Messiah's immediate forerunner. And on all these accounts together, if he was not prevented by any dishonest designs, he must have burned with impatience, to make known to all the neighbourhood where he lived, these certain assurances of the approaching deliverance of their whole nation, and his own great favour with God.

THE desire even of encreasing his own reputation must have concurred with his regard to virtue and religion, and forced him to make known such miraculous revelations, had they really accompanied the birth of his son. These considerations likewise were so far from remote, that they must naturally have occurred to every *Jew*, upon the first mention of the case. So that though, for argument's sake, we should suppose Zacharias, and all the rest, to have entered into a plot to bear witness

witness to these revelations, at the instigation of John ; this single circumstance, that they had never made the least mention of them, for the long interval of near twenty years, after they were affirmed to have come to pass, must effectually have betrayed the imposture, and caused it to be universally exploded.

Thus it appears impossible for John himself to have been the contriver of any such imposture, as that in question, if we suppose his parents, and all those who had been present at his circumcision, to have been still living, when he was capable of contriving it.

If now we suppose, what is far more probable to have been the case, that only some of them remained alive, when John may be thought capable of forming such a design ; the impossibility of his setting the plot on foot, without its being presently rejected, becomes more evident than before. For, in addition to all the arguments already alleged, which must effectually have destroyed the credit of such of them, as were yet alive to publish these relations ; the absolute silence of all those, who had even died without ever making mention of such miraculous events, would have rendered it still more apparent, that, no such revelations had ever really been made. That those, who now at length

length attested them, should have concealed them so long, was what no man could believe ; but that any of those, who were present when they happened, should even die without revealing them, was doubly incredible.

CAN it appear possible then, for John to have succeeded better in the supposed design ; if, in the last place, we should imagine, that Zacharias and Elizabeth, and all who had been present at his circumcision, were dead before he entered upon it ? Could he take advantage of the death of all, and *successfully* publish such forgeries as these ; when there were no longer any witnesses to be had, who could expressly declare his pretensions to be false ? On the contrary, it is apparent from what has just now been said, that this supposition, the only one remaining, must be, of all, the most unfavourable for his plot. For, could John himself have been foolish enough to lay claim to a divine character, upon the mere strength of these pretended revelations ; at a time, when he himself was the only person, who asserted he had ever heard a syllable of them ; and when every one of those persons to whom, he said, they had been made, were at length dead ; and dead too, without having ever revealed the least hint concerning them ; it is apparent he must at once have been rejected,

as the most shameless and abandoned of all impostors*.

SINCE therefore, on the other hand, it is certain, that John was not only esteemed a true prophet, by the people in general, but that even the Pharisees themselves, his avowed and early enemies, had no such argument to allege against his pretensions to a divine commission; it must necessarily be acknowledged, that there could be no room for this decisive objection. And thus, to convince us that these revelations, said to have accompanied the conception and birth of John, were undoubtedly noised abroad, by Zacharias and his friends concerned in them, throughout all the hill country of Judea, *immediately after John's circumcision*; and consequently, that it is absolutely impossible for them to have been forged by John.

* It would be idle to suppose here, that John might suborn witnesses to corroborate his own testimony, by asserting, that they had heard of these revelations, as well as himself; and that by this means his account might gain ground. For, not to insist on the great apparent difficulty and danger of such an attempt, it must have been utterly impossible for John to have procured such a number, as would by any means have been sufficient to give even an air of probability to their relations; while the contradictory evidence of others, of no less authority, must have effectually prevented their testimony from being received, after so long an interval had elapsed as that of twenty years.

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himself, or any persons at all connected with him, *after that time*; we have, at once, the express assurance of the evangelist, the obvious nature of the thing itself, and the unquestionable testimony of the very enemies of John.

SECTION II.

Supposing there was any deceit at all in the case; what the nature and design of the whole imposture must have been; and who must have been concerned in planning it out, and carrying it on.

THE miraculous events, said to have accompanied the birth of the Baptist, having thus approved themselves such as could not possibly be forged, either by Luke, or any of Jesus's disciples, after John's death; or by John himself, or any one else in conjunction with him, several years after his birth; there remains but one supposition more, which can possibly account for them on the foot of an imposture.

If the events in question did not really come to pass, in that supernatural manner in which they are related; then the whole must have been a plot, concerted before the Baptist's birth, between his parents Zacharias and Elizabeth, and whoever else shall appear to have been concerned with them in carrying it on. And all this must have been contrived purposely to impose their son upon the Jews
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for that prophet whom they expected God would send to proclaim the coming of the Messiah.

It is now therefore necessary to consider, whether *this* supposition is at all more capable of being admitted, than either of the former. And to proceed in this enquiry with clearness and certainty, it will be requisite, in the first place, to take a full view of the whole scheme of that imposture; in the prosecution of which, Zacharias must, on this supposition, have been engaged; as well as to know certainly, what associates he must have been connected with, in carrying it on.

This done, we may be enabled to determine the truth or falshood of the supposition, from considering the *nature* of the supposed design, the *circumstances and situation* of all the persons concerned, and the *manner* in which, it shall appear, they must actually have conducted it.

For, if the several circumstances of all those, who, on this supposition, must have contrived the plot in question, should make it incredible for them to have been engaged in such an undertaking;—if, besides, the supposed imposture itself should prove so absurd in its own nature, as to make it impossible to believe, that any one could be foolish enough to have planned it;—and again, if several particulars should occur in the progress of it, such as could not possibly have

been adopted by them, if they had; Zacharias, and all concerned, must be acquitted of all suspicion of deceit, and the prophetic character of the Baptist will be completely established.

By laying together some circumstances of importance in the case, it will immediately be seen, that if Zacharias was really engaged in the contrivance we have just been supposing, he could not be the only person who planned, and carried it on. On the contrary, it will be found, that whatever forgeries were made public by Zacharias and Elizabeth relating to John; Joseph and Mary must not only have been thoroughly acquainted with, and accessaries to them, but the plot itself must, from the beginning, have been concerted between them all.

It will appear likewise, that if the imposture supposed with regard to John had any real existence, *this alone* was not the *whole* design Zacharias must have been engaged in concerting; but there must have been, at the same time, a *similar plot* laid, and put in execution, relating to *Mary's son*; in the projection and support of which, Zacharias and Elizabeth must have been jointly engaged with Joseph and Mary themselves. The truth of these assertions will presently appear.

SUPPOSING all the circumstances recorded of John's birth, to have been no more than the several

veral particulars of a deep-laid imposture; Zacharias, we find, entered upon his design, by pretending to have seen an angel in the temple, who foretold even the conception as well as the birth of his son; commanding Zacharias, when the time came, to name him John; and declaring him ordained of God to be the immediate forerunner of the Messiah. That to prevent people from questioning the truth of so extraordinary a revelation, he immediately feigned himself dumb; signifying, that the angel had deprived him of speech, for a certain period, which he assigned as a punishment for his having doubted the truth of this astonishing prediction. That, in due time after this, his wife Elizabeth was delivered of a son, as he pretended the angel had foretold she should be. That to confirm still farther the angel's appearance in the temple, which was to serve for the foundation of the whole imposture; Zacharias, at his son's circumcision, named him John; and immediately pretending to have had his speech instantaneously restored, according to the angel's pretended declaration, he began to return thanks to God for his gracious dispensations. And, in fine, to give a still stronger sanction to the future divine character of his son, and to cover the whole plot with a greater air of solemnity, he himself immediately assumed the style of inspiration, and broke out

into a pretended prophecy; foretelling, that the Messiah himself was at length on the point of appearing; and, as before, that John was ordained to be his immediate forerunner*.

Such was the part *Zacharias* must have acted, in that scheme of imposture, which we are now supposing him to have contrived with regard to John.

As to his wife, *Elizabeth*, the very nature of the case evidently shews, that she must unavoidably have been a party to the design; and her behaviour, at the time of John's circumcision, sufficiently proves it. "And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him *Zacharias* after the name of his father. And his mother answered, and said; not so; but he shall be called *John*. And they said unto her, there is none of thy kindred, that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father how he would have him called; and he asked for a writing-table, and wrote, saying, his name is *John*. And they marvelled all."

HAD not *Zacharias* already engaged *Elizabeth* in the prosecution of whatever design he had in view, with regard to John; one could not have

* Luke ch. i. 16. Luke i. 59. found

found her, on this occasion, breaking through the custom of her country, to the no small surprise of all their relations present* ; evidently for no other end, than to obey the pretended commands of the angel to Zacharias, and by that means confirm the belief of his appearance in the temple. Elizabeth therefore must certainly, from this time at least, have been engaged in promoting the plot, which Zacharias had contrived, to serve for the foundation of the future imposture of their son.

But if all this extraordinary conduct of Zacharias and Elizabeth was really the effect of subtlety and deceit; there must likewise have been

* "The name was usually given to the child at the time of circumcision: (as we see was the case with John.)—They always had regard to the name of some person of distinction, who had been of the family."—Lewis's Heb. Antiq. B. 4. ch. i.

"God at the same time instituted circumcision, and changed the names of Abraham and Sarah: hence the custom of giving names to their children at the time of their circumcision."

"Amongst the several accounts, why this or that name was given to the sons, this was one that chiefly obtained, viz. For the honour of some person, whom they esteemed, they gave the child his name. Which seems to have guided them in this case here; when Zachary himself, being dumb, could not make his mind known to them.—Lightfoot on Luke i. 49.—Vol. II. p. 387. and likewise Vol. I. p. 421.

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another similar imposture carrying on, at the same time, by *Joseph* and *Mary*; and they must *all* have been engaged together in the joint prosecution of *both*. This the connection of the plots themselves, and the whole conduct of all the parties, will oblige us to acknowledge.

ZACHARIAS began his pretended prophecy, at the time of John's circumcision, thus: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people; and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as he spake, by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began*." This declaration, it is plain, could not possibly relate to John, who was not of the house of David; nor to any other person, than the Messiah himself. And in it Zacharias prophetically declared, that the God of Israel had, at that time, raised *him* up among them.

If then Zacharias was carrying on such a plot; as we now suppose, it is certain he must, before that time, have found out some of David's descendants, who had embarked with him in this deep-laid design; and, in concert with him, had already fixed upon some descendant of their own family, who should afterwards assume the sacred

* Luke i. 68.

character of the Messiah. To have uttered such a prophetic declaration, without first providing for its accomplishment, would have been purposely betraying his want of real inspiration, and publishing the whole deceit.

AND that in fact Zacharias was not guilty of so great an oversight as this, will immediately appear, from the following account of several extraordinary events, said to have come to pass above three months before the birth of John; and consequently some little time longer before Zacharias delivered this pretended revelation.

"AND * in the sixth month," after his appearance to Zacharias, "the angel Gabriel was sent from God, unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth; to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive

* Luke i. 26—46.

"ceive

conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son; and
 thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great,
 and shall be called the son of the Highest; and
 the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of
 his father David. And he shall reign over the
 house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom
 there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto
 the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know
 not a man? And the angel answered, and said
 unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon
 thee, and the power of the Highest shall over-
 shadow thee; therefore, also, that holy thing
 which shall be born of thee, shall be called the
 Son of God. And behold thy cousin Elizabeth,
 she hath also conceived a son in her old age,
 and this is the sixth month with her, who was
 called barren. For with God nothing shall be
 impossible. And Mary said, Behold the hand-
 maid of the Lord; be it unto me according to
 thy word. And the angel departed from her.
 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the
 hill country with haste, into a city of Judah,
 and entered into the house of Zacharias, and
 saluted Elizabeth. And it came to pass, that
 when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary,
 the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth
 was filled with the Holy Ghost. And she
 spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed
 art

" art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit
 " of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that
 " the mother of my Lord shall come to me? For
 " lo! as soon as the voice of thy salutation
 " sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my
 " womb for joy. And blessed is she that be-
 " lieved; for there shall be a performance of
 " those things, which were told her from the
 " Lord. And Mary said, My soul doth magnify
 " the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God
 " my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low
 " estate of his handmaiden; for behold, from
 " henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
 " For he that is mighty hath done me great things,
 " and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them
 " that fear him from generation to generation. He
 " hath shewed strength with his arm, he hath scat-
 " tered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
 " He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
 " and exalted them of low degree; he hath filled
 " the hungry with good things, and the rich he
 " hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his ser-
 " vant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as
 " he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to
 " his seed for ever.—And Mary abode with her
 " about three months, and returned to her own
 " house."

THE

THE particulars of this extraordinary relation will not suffer us to doubt the truth of the following conclusions. First, that if that part of the events here recorded, which relate to John, were the effects of contrivance and deceit; there must unquestionably have been *two* connected, though distinct schemes of imposture, set on foot by the same persons, at the same time; which, taken together, formed the *whole* of their plot.—And secondly, that though *one part* of this contrivance was more immediately under the direction of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, because it was of such a nature, that they only could conduct it; and *the other*, for the same reason, was principally executed by *Mary* and *Joseph*; yet the *whole design* must from the beginning have been planned, and agreed upon, between *All the Four*.

THE close connection between the angel's two messages to Zacharias and Mary, one of which expressly makes mention of the other; joined to the still more immediate dependance of Zacharias's prophecy upon both; shews plainly, that if the first of these revelations was a forgery, the second must have been so too; and that both must have been jointly contrived by all the parties concerned. Had either appearance of the angel been real, and, consequently, either message a divine revelation; whichever it was, it could not have borne
 test-

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testimony to the truth of one that was forged. Nor could *two* distinct schemes of imposture have been so contrived, that *one* should necessarily presuppose, and depend immediately upon the *other*; but by the original agreement, and joint conspiracy of the authors of *both*.

THE intercourse likewise between Elizabeth and Mary; their mutual declarations of the immediate interposition of God, in making one of them the mother of the Messiah, and the other of his immediate forerunner; their reciprocal congratulations upon this remarkable account; and their prophetic declarations in consequence of it; all these particulars prove to demonstration, that from the beginning they must have acted in concert to support each other's pretensions; and, consequently, that whatever impostures were carrying on among them, *Mary* must, from the first, have been jointly engaged with Elizabeth and Zacharias in the contrivance of the whole deceit.

THAT *Joseph* likewise must have been a principal in the plot, both the nature of the case, and several particulars in his conduct, will undeniably prove. When *Mary* began the part she performed, she had been already for some time espoused to *Joseph*, and was shortly to become his wife*.

So

* As the particular here taken notice of made a part of the matrimonial rites among the Jews, to which we have nothing similar

So circumstanced, it is plainly incredible, that Zacharias and Elizabeth should attempt to engage *Her* in a contrivance of such a nature as this, without first engaging *Joseph* to assist in the same design. The obvious and necessary consequence must otherwise have been that Joseph would immediately have become their professed enemy; Mary's reputation must very soon have been

similar ourselves; it may be proper here to observe, that among the Jews no one could be *married*, who had not been before *espoused*. That the ceremony of the *espousal* was as much a *fixed*, and *necessary rite*, as those more immediately observed at the final completion of the *marriage*. The different *forms of espousing* were all minutely prescribed; they were to be transacted before witnesses; and they were celebrated with a feast. The *espousal* was a solemn engagement between the several parties concerned, *essentially preparatory* to the *marriage*; and the times which were to elapse between them, were limited in some respects. From the time of the *espousal*, the woman was considered *as the wife* of the man to whom she was espoused; in every respect, except that they did not live together; and the utmost care and caution were observed in the regulation of her conduct; as the same *capital punishments* were inflicted on *her*, on account of any failures in it during this interval, *before the marriage*, as *after* she was actually married; and were even extended, in some degree, to those under whose care she now remained.—See all the particulars relating to this point at large, in Selden's *Ux. Heb.* 1. 2. c. 3, and 8.—Bafnage's *Hist. of the Jews*, B. 5, 19, sect. 9, &c.—Lewis's *Heb. Antiq.* B. 6. c. 33, 35, 36.—Allix's *Reflect. on the O. T.* ch. 20, p. 242, 244.

blasted;

blasted ; and the integrity of Zacharias and Elizabeth themselves would have been rendered, at least, so extremely suspicious, that, though their iniquitous designs should not have been plainly detected, yet their whole intended imposture must have been effectually put an end to.

NOR is it more certain, from the very nature of the case, that *Joseph*, as well as *Mary*, must, from the beginning, have been engaged in the prosecution of the plot ; than it is clear, from his own conduct, that he was at least as active in promoting it, as any of them all. No sooner had Zacharias played his part at the circumcision of John, than Joseph began *his* ; with an account of still more divine revelations made to himself ; all evidently calculated to serve the same design, and promote the credit of those already given out by Zacharias and Mary.

“ Now * the birth of Jesus was on this wise.
 “ When as his mother Mary was espoused to
 “ Joseph, before they came together, she was found
 “ with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her
 “ husband, being a just man, and not willing to
 “ make her a public example, was minded to put
 “ her away privily. But while he thought on
 “ these things, behold, the angel of the Lord ap-

* Matt. i. 18—24.

“ peared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph,
“ thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee
“ Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in
“ her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring
“ forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus;
“ for he shall save his people from their sins.—Then
“ Joseph, being raised from sleep, did as the angel
“ of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him
“ his wife.”

THUS did Joseph endeavour to strengthen the authority of what Mary had already related, concerning her future son; some months before Jesus was born. And to this revelation, we find, he afterwards added two more, admirably fitted to promote the same end.

“ AND * when they,” the wise men, “ were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth
“ to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the
“ young child, and his mother, and flee into Egypt;
“ and be thou there until I bring thee word; for
“ Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.
“ When he arose, he took the young child, and
“ his mother, by night, and departed into Egypt.
“ —But, when Herod was dead, behold the angel
“ of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in
“ Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child,

* Matt. ii. 13—21.

“ and

“ and his mother, and go into the land of Israel.
 “ And he arose, and took the young child,
 “ and his mother, and came into the land of
 “ Israel.”

If then there was any deceit contriving among them, *Joseph*, it is certain, must have been full as active as the rest, in promoting the common cause; since he must have forged no less than three revelations in its behalf. Nay, it appears, he must have put himself to all the inconveniences, of banishing himself and his family from his own country, for a considerable time, purely to gain credit to these stories, of his own inventing, for its support.

At length, therefore, we may venture to affirm, what the very nature of the case, as well as the clear evidence of facts, have so fully proved; that, if the events recorded of the birth of *John* were only the several particulars of a deep-laid deceit; those relating to the birth of *Jesus* must have been so too; that the supposition of *One* of these impostures necessarily includes the *Other*; and that *Zacharias, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph*, must *All* have been jointly engaged in the planning, and prosecution of *Both*.

THIS conclusion immediately points out, in what method we must now proceed, to enquire into the real existence of the impostures in debate.

Should it appear impossible for *These four persons* to have been connected together, in the joint contrivance of this double deception, the question will then be decided. All suspicion of Zacharias's integrity must be rejected as groundless and false; the *Baptist* must be submitted to, as one inspired from above; and *Jesus* consequently be received as the undoubted Messiah.

At the same time it must become equally evident, from the very nature of the case, and without any regard had to the testimony of *John*; that all the circumstances recorded of the birth of *Jesus* must actually have come to pass, in that supernatural manner, in which they are related; and therefore, that on *this distinct* account likewise, we have the fullest assurance, that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah.

Now supposing the contrivances just explained to have been really undertaken, by all those, who, we have just seen, must have conspired together to carry them on; one of the following suppositions must unavoidably be allowed. Either,

1st, ZACHARIAS and Elizabeth must have been the original and real contrivers of *Both* these designs; as well that relating to Mary's son, as their own; and by means of some advantages, which Joseph and Mary might be made to hope for from the *One*, must have persuaded them to become their accomplices in *Both*. Or,

2dly,

2dly, ZACHARIAS must have been the projector of that design only, which immediately concerned *his* son; and Joseph and Mary, in like manner, have first planned the imposture in favour of *their* son. Or,

3dly, JOSEPH and Mary must have contrived *Both* the plots; and so have persuaded Zacharias to conspire with them, in promoting that immediately relating to Mary's son; in hopes of some advantages to be drawn from the success of the other, relating to his own son.

If they were *All* thus united in these schemes of iniquity, one or other of these suppositions must of necessity be true; since the case itself will admit of no more. It must now, therefore, be our business to evince the incredibility of them *all*; and this, in the first place, from considering the *particular characters*, and other *material circumstances*, of *all the parties concerned*.

SECTION III.

Zacharias and Elizabeth could not be the contrivers of that wicked imposture, which the supposition of any deceit at all, in this case, necessarily obliges us to admit of.

THAT Zacharias himself and his wife Elizabeth were esteemed, by all who knew them, persons of sincere virtue and integrity, we may be sure, as there has already been occasion to prove*, from the remarkable good character Luke has given them, in the very opening of his gospel; that "they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." The evangelist could not have ventured on this assertion, were it capable of being disproved. And as Zacharias was a priest, one of that particular order of men, in which a more exemplary conduct is naturally required to establish an universal good name; and whose failings are naturally censured with greater severity, than those of any other profession; so his unblemished character could not have been

* See note, p. 36.

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supported by any other means, than an uniform discharge of all the moral and religious duties of the Jewish law.

• Among the Jews, it is well known, that the priesthood was absolutely confined to one family only. No one could be admitted to exercise the priestly functions, till he had clearly proved his immediate descent from some priest of the family of Aaron, and was found to be free from every, the least personal blemish. When a candidate had undergone these examinations, he was capable of being admitted to perform some duties in the temple, at twenty years of age; and from that time continued, in his turn, a kind of probationer in all the employments there, till the age of thirty; when he became qualified to discharge every part of the priestly office*.

UNDER

* "The succession of the Hebrew priesthood was established in the family of Aaron; the *pontifical dignity* was fixed in the line of his first-born. All others of his posterity were priests, simply so called; or priests of the *second Order*. The fixed and consistent time of the priest's entering into the service, was at the age of thirty; but at five and twenty they were probationers, and might do some offices, but not all." (And even from the age of twenty, after David's time; as Lightfoot proves from 1 Chron. xxiii. 24—27.) "Their instalment and admission into the service, was in this manner. The great Sanhedrim sat daily in the room Gazith, to judge concerning the priests that came to age, and were to be admitted: and if

UNDER such an institution it would be absurd to suppose, that no attention was paid to a priest's moral character; and much more so to imagine, that one of this order should be able to preserve from youth to old age, the reputation of exemplary goodness; had not his actions themselves plainly shewn him to have deserved it. As certainly as the smallest blemish in his person, which was prohibited by the law, would have prevented Zacharias from officiating in the temple worship; so certainly would any vicious irregularities in his conduct and conversation have deprived him of that amiable character, which, it appears from the evangelist, he must have died possessed of. It was impossible for the Jews in general not to agree in this particular with Moses their law-giver; who

they proved duly qualified, they clothed them in white, and enrolled them among the order, and they went in and ministered; and the great council rejoiced to find them perfect, and blessed God for it with a solemn prayer. But if the person proved to be of the right line, and had any of the blemishes, which rendered him incapable of the ministry;" (of which were reckoned 140) "he was sent into the wood-room to worm the wood for the altar; and had his portion of the things with the men of the house of his father, and did eat with them."—Lewis's Heb. Antiq. B. 2. ch. 6. See the chapter; and Lightfoot, vol. I. p. 915. Selden de Success. in Pontif. Ebræ. l. 2. c. 5. Lev. xxi. 16. ad finem. Spencer de Leg. Heb. l. 1. c. 10. p. 177.

de.

designed, "that the priests should be not only in every respect faultless, in the discharge of their sacred functions; but that they should exert their earnest endeavours to approve themselves unblameable in their daily conversation, and common intercourse with the world *." And, had not this been the rule of Zacharias's conduct, he could not possibly have obtained, and left behind him, so fair a reputation.

ELIZABETH'S sphere of action must have been much less public than that of Zacharias. But her alliance with a man of such approved worth, when considered jointly with her having, in fact, maintained the same virtuous character as himself, which it appears she did, deprives us, at once, of the least shadow of a reason for calling her integrity into question. Besides, the very profession of her husband affords no inconsiderable testimony to her virtue.

THERE was nothing, we are informed, about which the Jews were more scrupulous, than the marriages of their priests; not only to prevent such alliances as would taint their blood, but such likewise as might tend to corrupt their morals,

* Μη μόνον δε περί τας ιερωγίας καθαρός είναι, συνάδειν δε, και περί την αὐτοῦ διαίταν, ὥστε αὐτὴν ἀμώκλον εἶναι. — Josephi Antiq. Jud. I. 3. 12. sub. init.

and

and lessen their reputation. The law * itself expressly prohibited them from marrying, not only such as were of known ill character, or whose integrity could be thought in the least suspicious; but even those, whose situations in life exposed them to more danger of being vitiated than others; and even the children of all such persons. By means of which precautions, it became at length even a proverbial expression among the Jews, to denote a woman of an exemplary character; "that she deserved to marry with a priest." And the most honourable alliance a priest could enter into was with one of priestly extraction, which Elizabeth herself was †.

To argue from these cautious restrictions only, however remarkable, that the wife of every Jewish priest must necessarily have been a person of an excellent moral character, would be drawing a conclusion, which the weakness of human nature could not possibly bear. But when we consider, in addition to the character of Zacharias her husband, and all these circumstances so much in her favour, the positive reputation of so unexception-

* Levit. xxi.—See Lewis's Heb. Antiq. B. 2. 6.—Josephus's Jew. Antiq. l. 3, 12. sub. init.—Idem contra App. l. 1. 7.—Lightfoot, vol. II. p. 379.

† "And his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth." Luke i. 5.

able a life, as Elizabeth left behind her; we can no longer doubt of her integrity, without preferring a mere groundless and obstinate prejudice, to the plain reason of the thing.

So circumstanced then as Zacharias and Elizabeth were, nothing can be more unreasonable than to suspect, that their virtue might be no better than hypocrisy, and their reputation maintained by some artful disguise. To obtain the applause of numbers for a time, by means of some remarkable actions of a specious nature, may, perhaps, be no very difficult task. Extraordinary fits of zeal, and instances of severe mortification, have at times been able to establish a character for virtue, where the principle was certainly wanting. But to preserve an uninterrupted reputation for goodness and piety, through the several stages of life, even to advanced age, without laying claim to any uncommon flights of virtue, or aiming at such actions as are plainly calculated to procure popular applause, seems far beyond the power of any thing less than the peaceable conscientious discharge of all the duties of our station,

THAT such was the conduct of Zacharias and Elizabeth, we have good reason to believe from their very character itself. The evangelist says nothing of their extraordinary fits of devotion,
and

and pious zeal. But "they were both righteous," we are told, "before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." A character, equally remote from all affected dazzling displays of more public virtue; and all the severer rigours of sanctified enthusiasm. A character, which, as it plainly shews they made it their chief care and study, to live void of offence, towards God and man; so it as evidently implies, that they never attempted to establish an ill-grounded reputation, by any indirect means. And indeed, had they attempted it, their middle station in life, by exposing the general tenour of their conduct to the familiar observation of all their neighbours, would have made it impossible for them to have supported, through life, this peculiar kind of good fame, by any other means, than the real practice of that goodness, they had the reputation of possessing. From all these reasons laid together, we are therefore bound to believe that Zacharias and Elizabeth must have really merited the good name they maintained; that is, that they must have been just and benevolent in all their dealings with man, and sincere worshippers of God.

CAN it then be conceived, that any persons of this virtuous and religious disposition could be capable of deliberately forming so iniquitous a scheme,

scheme, as we are now to enquire, whether it is possible for Zacharias and Elizabeth to have contrived? Can it be imagined, that a priest of the God of Israel, who was likewise a man of approved piety and goodness, could conceive and prosecute so impious a design, as that of setting up his own son for the Messiah's forerunner; and prevailing with another person to set up his, to counterfeit the most sacred and awful character of the Messiah himself?

ZACHARIAS, a devout priest of the God of Israel, must have been thoroughly instructed in all his miraculous and merciful dispensations to his forefathers, as well as his severe judgements executed upon them for their impieties. He must have believed the predictions of Moses and all the prophets. He must at this very time not only have expected, but wished to see the arrival of the true Elias, and the manifestation of the long promised Messiah. And he must unquestionably have believed, that God would assuredly accomplish the the plans of his divine providence; and not permit any counterfeits of these sacred and important characters to go off undetected, or the abettors of such impious undertakings to escape without signal punishment.

WAS it then possible for a good man, furnished with this knowledge, guided by this belief, and

actuated by these hopes and fears, to have contrived so execrable a design, purely to pull down the vengeance of God upon him? Could such a man doom his *own* son, even before his birth, to be the perpetrator of *One* such impious imposture; and, as if *that* were not wickedness enough, persuade his friends to engage as deeply in the prosecution of *Another*? If so, he who served devoutly at the altar of the God of truth, must voluntarily have contrived and published the most mischievous and shocking falsehoods; he who believed all the miraculous interpositions of God's power, so frequently displayed in the deliverance and establishment of his own nation, and lived in hopes of a still greater deliverance, which God had promised shortly to send them; must voluntarily have set himself up to oppose the accomplishment of those gracious promises; which, at the same time, he both hoped and believed, would certainly be fulfilled. In short, he, who expected the reign of the Messiah to be productive of the utmost glory and happiness to his whole nation, must purposely have endeavoured to prevent the happy consequence of his appearance; by setting up, before he came, an impostor in his stead. But these are suppositions in their own nature evidently contradictory and absurd. And indeed, the whole of this supposed contrivance

trivance is of so very iniquitous a nature, that none but the *most abandoned* of men could ever possibly conceive or undertake it; and therefore impossible to have been devised or carried on, by One, who, we have sufficient reason to believe, must have been *eminently good*.

BUT had not Zacharias's and Elizabeth's character, and situation, proved it so clearly impossible for *Them* to have been *capable* of engaging in such a plot; still their *age* would have rendered it utterly incredible, that they *should*.

At the time when we must suppose them to be entering upon the execution of this design, they were neither of them young, nor even in the vigour of life; but, on the contrary, *they were both well stricken in years*; a circumstance of the greatest importance to illustrate their innocence with regard to this particular imposture. Whatever ambitious views we may imagine capable of prompting any one to so desperate an undertaking, must naturally have cooled, and died away, in the decline of life; however warmly they might have been actuated by them before. That daring spirit of enterprize, and defiance of danger, which sometimes engages men in the most desperate attempts, to gratify the wishes of ambition, in the active and vigorous parts of life, generally gives way to cautious and timid apprehensions, when
age

age has bounded the prospect before them, and checked the current of the blood. Then too religious apprehensions begin to intrude themselves upon the mind; and make men little inclined to embark in hazardous plots of extreme wickedness and impiety, whatever they may have done before. So that could we suppose them capable of having formed such a plan of imposture, and resolved to put it in execution, at that active age, when a vitious ambition has sometimes led men into the most extravagant enormities; yet their having continued childless till they were now *well stricken in years*, and all hopes of an opportunity to execute it were at length at an end, must unquestionably have caused them long since to drop all thoughts of their former design.

To imagine, that after this, upon the unexpected birth of a son, they should resume it again, *in their old age*; and prosecute it with such a series of unheard-of devices, as forged revelations, feigned loss of speech, and pretended prophecies; would be supposing them to have arrived at such a hardened pitch of iniquity, as nothing less than a life of continued and notorious wickedness was able to bring them to. But after what has been seen already of their true character and conduct, we may venture to say *this* would be a supposition, that must certainly be false.

FARTHER,

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FARTHER, the incredibility of their resuming the plot supposed, becomes still more undeniable, when we consider, that it was now likewise too late for them to indulge any of those ambitious designs, for the sake of which only, even obstinacy itself can pretend, such an imposture could be contrived, and undertaken. Had the birth of their son happened while they were in the vigour of life, they might conceive hopes, it may be said, of deriving great honour and advantage to themselves, from being the parents of the reputed " prophet of the " highest ; who was to go before the face of " the Lord to prepare his ways ; to give knowledge of salvation to his people." But John was not born till Zacharias and Elizabeth were so advanced into the decline of life, that all such hopes of enjoying the fruits of their iniquity must necessarily have expired.

FROM the very nature of that character, which, according to this supposition, they must have designed him to counterfeit ; nothing could be more probable, than that they themselves might not live till the very earliest period, when it could be proper, or even possible, for John to undertake it. He, who, by their own predictions, was " to " go before the Lord in the spirit and power of " Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to " the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom

dom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord ;" could not take upon him the awful name of so exalted a prophet, and attempt to fulfill the great purposes of this divine commission ; till he was arrived at that age, which was requisite for the compleat performance of even the duties of a common priest. And accordingly it appears in fact, that neither John nor Jesus assumed their public characters, till they were just approaching the age of thirty years. This *very distant* period therefore was the *earliest* at which Zacharias and Elizabeth could hope for even the small satisfaction, of bringing their long-planned imposture to the trial, and seeing whether there was any probability of imposing thus on the world. Or should it be imagined, they might not think it necessary for John and Jesus to pay this scrupulous regard, in point of time, to the legal age of a priest ; they must, however, be sensible, that the impostors they were contriving to raise up, could not possibly appear in those difficult characters they intended them to sustain, *at the soonest*, till they had already past the first age of a man.

BUT what can be more inconceivable, than that they, who were already old and *well stricken in years*, should set themselves to lay the foundation of such an imposture, to gratify their own aspiring de-

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desires, as could not be set on foot, till no less than between twenty and thirty years after, and then must be extremely uncertain of success? Should they have happened to live to this period, and even have seen their wicked artifices succeed; suppositions both of them in the highest degree improbable; what advantages could they then expect to reap from them; when extreme old age would scarce have left them the perception of any thing this world could bestow; and they were just tottering into the grave? Had they therefore been wicked enough to be capable of contriving such a design, as well as of executing whatever plot might seem to flatter their ambitious desires; it is utterly incredible, that at their *advanced age*, they should plan, or determine to wait the issue of a project so *foolish* as this.

As to any advantages to be procured from the contrivance before John should be old enough to act his designed part; it is evident they expected none. They neither endeavoured to make him be personally taken notice of, before that time; nor took pains to spread far and wide, their accounts of so many miracles, as having attended his birth. Both which they would certainly have done, had they been influenced by any such expectations. On the contrary, we find, that " John was in the " desarts until the day of his shewing unto Is-

“fact*.” And so far were they from assiduously spreading abroad, *everywhere*, the miracles just mentioned; that when John afterwards began to baptize, “all men misused in their hearts whether he were the Christ or not†.” And some time after this, even after he had baptized Jesus, and declared him to be the Messiah, “the Jews sent priests and levites from Jerusalem, to ask him, “who art thou‡?” Upon both which occasions, as well as many others, the majority appeared so inclined to think he might be the Christ, that John himself thought it necessary to tell them plainly, “he was not the Christ;” but only “the voice of “one crying in the wilderness, make straight the “way of the Lord§.”

At the time then, when John was preaching among them, it is plain the Jews in general formed their conjectures of his character, merely from his appearance as a great prophet, and their own expectations of the Messiah; not from divine revelations of the particular character he was to bear, assiduously spread abroad, among *all* the people, by his parents, from the very time of his birth. From whence it is plain, that though they

* Luke, ch. iii. 15.—John began to appear in his public character about the thirtieth year of his age.

† Luke, ch. iii. 15.

‡ John, ch. i. 19.

§ John, ch. i. 20, 23.

did not conceal those astonishing events, with which he was introduced into the world ; yet they had not made it their business, as impostors would have done, to make them universally known ; but, in compliance with the natural suggestions of an honest and upright mind, had published them, as we have already seen, in all the neighbourhood, where they lived ; and waited, with a pious resignation, for the accomplishment of those predictions, which they knew assuredly were divine.

AND thus it seems evident, that *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* could not possibly have set on foot, any such iniquitous imposture, as that in question ; which was to be carried into execution afterwards by *John*. *Zacharias's religious profession*, and station in life ; the *remarkable good character*, which both He and *Elizabeth* always maintained, and at length died possessed of ; and the *advanced age* they had already arrived at, at the time of the birth of *John* ; considered jointly with some very material particulars in the supposed plot itself ; are all so many convincing arguments of the utter incredibility of *their* having been the authors of such an imposture ; and when laid together in one view, prove the supposed fact, with satisfactory evidence, to have been morally impossible.

BUT besides, did not the circumstances and situation of *Zacharias* render it so highly incredible for

him to have been the contriver of such a plot, as that in debate, relating to *his own son*; still it would be on all accounts inconceivable, that he could choose to add to it such another, as that we are now supposing him to have contrived for the son of *Mary*.

It will be freely confessed indeed, that if Zacharias had been wicked enough to plan *one* of these designs, no scruples of conscience could have prevented him from entering upon *the other*. But, what honesty would not have prevented, policy would; and his concern for the success of the enterprize intended for *John*, would not have permitted Zacharias to have rendered it dependant upon the success of such another, as that relating to *Jesus*.

ZACHARIAS cannot be imagined to have contrived the imposture in debate for Mary's son, and to have connected it so closely with that relating to his own; unless he thought it would prove beneficial to *John's* undertaking, and serve to promote *his* success. The success of his own son was what he must have had *most* at heart; nor could he therefore join any other plot with this; which he did not imagine would make John's imposture more likely to succeed, than it would have been without it.

BUT

BUT is it possible he could hope for any advantage, of this kind, from the supposed imposture of *Jesus*? In other words, could he believe *That* more likely to succeed, than the undertaking he had planned for John? On the contrary, it is evident at first sight, Zacharias must have known, that, difficult as *John's* enterprize might prove, *That* of *Jesus* must be infinitely more so: and consequently, that the prosecution of *Both*, in a mutual dependance upon each other, would be so far from assisting *John*, that it must unavoidably render *his* attempt far more hazardous, than it would have been *alone*.

THE design we are supposing him to have planned for John, was only to counterfeit the Messiah's *forerunner*; whereas the enterprize he must have intended for Jesus, was nothing less than to support the character of the Messiah *himself*. The most particular idea the Jews had been able to form of the Messiah's *forerunner*, was little more, than that he would appear among them, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord; with all that spirit of piety, severity, and mortification, which had remarkably distinguished one of their former prophets. But such was their universal interpretation of the various prophecies, concerning the life and actions of the *Messiah*; that whoever should assume his character, it was well

known, would be expected to make himself their king.

Thus the pretended Forerunner might conduct himself in the most peaceable, and least dangerous manner; whereas the counterfeit Messiah, in order to be received, would be under a necessity of laying claim to the supreme power; and wresting it out of the hands of those, who already possessed it. The earnest preaching of repentance, joined to the continued practice of mortification, and a perfect freedom from all suspicion of any vice, might be sufficient to establish the character of the One; whereas nothing less than the exertion of supernatural powers, in uttering great prophecies, and working great miracles, would answer the expectations of the Jews, or induce them to give credit to the Other. All this Zacharias could not but be well apprized of, and reflect upon. And consequently, the superior dangers and difficulties unavoidably attending *this last* undertaking, prove it absolutely impossible, for Zacharias to have laid the scheme of the supposed imposture of Jesus, in order to facilitate the success of the other design, to be executed by John. It is apparent, that he himself must have known, that this would be the readiest way to defeat it.

So that, in addition to what has been already proved, that Zacharias could not possibly be a
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man of such abandoned principles, as to have been *capable* of conceiving these impious designs; and moreover, that, if he had, his *age alone* would have effectually prevented him from setting them on foot; it now appears farther, to be equally incredible, that he could be *foolish enough* jointly to adopt them. And since it is undeniably certain, that both these transactions proceeded, from the beginning, in a mutual and close dependance upon each other; and that besides, whether they were the effects of divine providence or human iniquity, Zacharias was, from the first, intimately concerned in *Both*; we must be forced to acknowledge, that the divine pretensions of John and Jesus could not be founded upon any such *deceits*; or at least, that *Zacharias and Elizabeth could not be the contrivers of them BOTH*, if they were.

SECTION IV.

Zacharias and Elizabeth could not be the authors of any such double imposture, as must here be supposed.

SHOULD we now for a while neglect all that has been proved in vindication of *Zacharias's* innocence, and suppose him to have been wicked enough to be *desirous* of setting up his son for the Messiah's forerunner; still his intimate connection with *Joseph* and *Mary*, throughout the whole of these transactions, is such a particular as will not permit us to believe he *actually did*. Had he been ever so desirous of carrying into execution this plot relating to *John*; it was of so dangerous a nature, that he could not have ventured to connect it with *any other* undertaking, whether advantageous or not, which would oblige him to *lay open* his impious design, to any person whatever. He would certainly have contrived it so as to carry it on by *Elizabeth's* help alone, without any other associates; or, if he thought this could not be effectually done, he would entirely have laid aside the design.

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THE impoſture in debate relating to *John only*, was in every reſpect of ſo very bad and unpromiſing a nature; that Zacharias himſelf muſt have believed he was almoſt certain of being betrayed, ſooner or later, by any one to whom he might venture to impart it. Such only, as were of the moſt abandoned principles, could be at all expected to join in a conſpiracy for frustrating the moſt ancient and received predictions of the prophets, by counterfeiting the character of the Meſſiah's forerunner. At the ſame time Zacharias well knew, that the ſucceſs of his plot muſt appear to all next to impoſſible, on account of the univerſal expectation, at this time, of the ſpeedy arrival of the true Meſſiah himſelf; and likewise, that the utmoſt advantages he could propoſe to obtain by it, even if it could ſucceed, were moſt exceedingly dubious and remote.

THIS being the apparent nature of the caſe, Zacharias could not but believe, that all thoſe, who were the *only* perſons capable of conſpiring in ſo wicked a deſign, would without heſitation rejeſt *This* we are conſidering. Such veterans in iniquity would certainly require a plot, that had a much ſurer, and a much nearer proſpect of ſucceſs; as well as more ample rewards to allure them to ſo hazardous an enterprize. For in *This*, they all knew, that no leſs than certain death
would

would be the inevitable consequence of detection. It was a law God himself had given * them, "That the prophet, which should presume to speak a word in his name, which he had not commanded him to speak, should die." And we are well informed, "That when once any one was convicted of such an imposture, and of pretending a divine commission, when God had not sent him; no character or interest was powerful enough to save him from punishment †." And certainly *he* who should dare to publish false prophecies, to promote so impious a fraud as this, above all others, could expect no mercy.

* Deut. xviii. 20—"The prophetic spirit being so common among the Hebrews, it was necessary there should be a method of trial established, to prevent impostors, and to discern the false prophet from the true. For it could not be expected but, in a nation where there was such a number of prophets, many pretenders would arise; who would endanger the faith of the people, unless there were some certain way to find them out. The more effectually therefore to deter men, either from counterfeiting a prophetic spirit, or hearkening to them that did; God appointed a severe punishment for every such pretender; who, upon legal conviction, was to suffer death.—The Jews generally understand this of strangling; as they do always in the law, when the particular manner of death is not expressed."—They were tried by the sanhedrim. Lewis's Heb. Antiq. B. 2. 16.—Selden de synedr. lib. 3. c. 6.

† Lewis, *ibid.* near the end.

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Part I.

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NOR was it the only, or even the strongest reason, that must have deterred Zacharias, from attempting to procure *associates* in *such* a plot; that its dangerous nature would have deterred every one from engaging in it; there were besides the strongest *temptations* imaginable to betray it. Nothing could be more distant, precarious, and chimerical, than any advantages to be expected from its success. But *he* might assure himself of immediate and ample rewards, who should detect so impious and sacrilegious a priest of the most high God; as had not only contrived a plot for setting up his own son, to counterfeit the *Messiah's forerunner*; but would have persuaded another to set up an impostor, even for the *Messiah himself*. The detection of such complicated and enormous villainy, directly calculated to make the nation reject the true Messiah, when he should come; and set on foot at the very time when he was soon expected to appear; would unquestionably have met with a reward, proportionable to the importance of the discovery. The whole nation, priests and people, would have considered their own safety as intimately concerned, in the putting a stop to such astonishing wickedness, in the very sanctuary itself; and would immediately have rewarded whoever laid it open, in a far more ample

ple manner, than the imposture itself, even if successful, could ever be expected to do.

ZACHARIAS, therefore, had he actually resolved upon any such deceit with regard to *John*; could never have added to it *any other* plot, which laid him under the necessity of attempting to procure *associates* at so imminent a hazard of his life. He knew very well, that to whomsoever he laid himself open, they would have all the most powerful temptations possible, to betray him; but none to engage with him in so desperate an undertaking.

Let us, however, suppose him such an able deceiver, that he might think to persuade some, into the hopes of inconceivable advantages, to be gained by this contrivance; and to represent it in such a light, as to make it appear in the end almost certain of success. Notwithstanding these large concessions, we shall find him still under the same dilemma as before.

It was impossible he could expect to gain confederates in his design, by the hopes of any advantages it might produce; since the imposture was of such a nature, that it could not even be brought to the trial till *about twenty years after*. Such as wade the deepest in iniquity to gratify their restless desires, are but little able to brook even accidental delays. Much less can they be supposed to enter into designs, professedly calculated

culated for so tedious a procrastination. Men of sincere virtue indeed, and extensive benevolence, are sometimes seen to labour contentedly through life, for the accomplishment of whatever useful and generous pursuits they have in view. That self-complacency, which attends the prosecution of all virtuous designs, carries them calmly through every difficulty; and keeps alive the vigour of application to such undertakings, as require a long series of time to bring them to perfection. But schemes of iniquity, and dark projects of deceit, keep the thoughts even of the abandoned themselves in so uneasy a suspense, that they cannot but be desirous of soon determining the event.

To suppose men knowingly to conspire together in a most impious undertaking, of *such* a nature, as to render it absolutely impossible for them to derive the least benefit from it, for the long interval of *more than twenty years*, would be supposing, what is directly opposite to the nature of a depraved and vicious heart, and inconsistent with the frame of the human mind. Not to observe, at the same time, that however sure of success any such conspiracy might appear, the uncertainty of *life itself*, for so long a period, would render any benefits to be expected from it, in the highest degree precarious. So that laying
aside

aside every other consideration ; this *single* circumstance of the plot, that the whole must necessarily lie dormant from the *birth of John*, at the least till he was *full twenty years of age*, was inconsistent with every motive that could possibly induce any one to join in such an imposture. Nor could Zacharias therefore have hazarded his own safety so far, as foolishly to reveal *such* a design, in hopes of procuring accomplices in his guilt.

It is likewise still more incredible, that he should have ventured on this dangerous experiment, could he even have believed it possible to gain over some parties to his plot ; on this farther account, that he must know he had little less to fear, from whoever he might prevail with to *assist* in his designs, than those who should at once *reject* them. This long interval of *more than twenty years*, which must of necessity elapse, between the contrivance, and the execution of the imposture ; afforded room for so many vicissitudes in the circumstances, and such a change of the inclinations, of whoever might at first *join* with him in it ; as would give him the greatest reason to apprehend a discovery of it, even from *them* ; before it could have a chance for success.

If an exaggerated representation of the advantages to be expected from it, had at first warmed them in the pursuit ; and from what has been
proved

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proved already, it is certain, nothing else could; this was a length of time, in which they must frequently cool, and reflect upon the folly and uncertainty of the attempt. If they entered into it through licentious confidence, and the overweening prospects of artificial joy, and temporary fits of resolution; here was full time enough for the frequent despondencies of an evil spirit to undo the charm, and place the folly of so strange a design full before their eyes. And what then could be expected from them, but that at least in the despondencies of sickness, and at the approach of death, circumstances very highly probable to attend them within so long a period, they would naturally be led to make an ample discovery of so wicked a contrivance; and bring the authors of it, if alive, to condign punishment, before it could be put to the trial?

NAY, neither death nor sickness would have been at all requisite to bring on this discovery. Whoever was capable of *entering into* such a confederacy as *this*, for any such distant and precarious advantages, as it might seem at first to promise, must certainly have been capable of *betraying* it, when their first sanguine hopes of its benefits died away; and they saw good reason to expect a far better, as well as immediate reward, for revealing it.

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It is evident then, on various accounts, that this supposed imposture was of *such* a nature, as not only to deprive Zacharias of all hopes of engaging *any one* to conspire with him in it, but even to render it almost certain, that, whoever he should impart it to, *whether they became associates in it or not*, would sooner or later *betray* his impious designs.

HENCE it must readily be allowed, that if the plot, we have been supposing, with regard to *John*, could have any real existence; and Zacharias could have been the contriver of the deceit; he certainly would not have joined to it *any other* plan of imposture, which would lay him under a necessity of procuring some *accomplices*, who must be made privy to *Both*. He would have prosecuted the *first* design, which was what he was chiefly concerned for, *alone*; and his wife *Elizabeth* would have been found his *only* assistant in carrying it on.

Nor is there room to object here, that though the truth of all this must be owned, yet perhaps it might not occur to *Zacharias*; who might be so possessed with the hopes of succeeding in this extraordinary design, by the help of some associates, as to overlook the imminent danger he must incur, in endeavouring to procure them. True indeed, it is, that impostors are sometimes off their guard, and found to act inconsistently, when their
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conduct is detected. But, in the supposed case before us, the danger of being betrayed was on many accounts so great, and on all accounts so obvious, that it could not have escaped the notice even of a raw beginner in the practice of deceit. In this case, therefore, nothing can make it credible, that *Zacharias*, above all others, could be guilty of so total a want of circumspection, in a particular, which so nearly concerned, not his success only, but his safety; not his reputation alone, but his life.

SHOULD we imagine him to have been capable of planning the deceit before us, we should be forced to own, at the same time, that he must have been the most cautious and careful concealer of his true character and actions, that ever lived. If at his age, and in his religious profession, he was capable of setting on foot so impious an undertaking; it is evident he must have been long hardened in wickedness, and have grown old in sin. Yet sure we are, that both *He* and *Elizabeth* had found means to support an exemplary character, which was never called in question. And this too, notwithstanding that the witness, which *John* afterwards bore to *Jesus*, must naturally have led many of the Jews, and more especially the rulers, to enquire scrupulously into *their* life and conversation. But *He*, who could thus manage to advance in esteem for virtue, in

proportion as he proceeded to greater lengths in iniquity, and never drew on himself the least suspicion of his guilt, must have been far too cautious a veteran in deceit, to have run the hazard of betraying himself in the manner now under consideration.

A PLOT, which, we have seen, he must originally have contrived, so *many* years before the birth of a son gave him an opportunity to attempt it; and which he must so often, in the mean time, have revolved every particular of, when the fondness of conceit and the warmth of expectation were over, could not possibly draw so wary a deceiver into an oversight so obvious and so dangerous as this.

AFTER all, it plainly appears from the supposed contrivance itself, that he could have no end to answer by this step, in the least degree adequate to the danger incurred by it. None indeed could be of sufficient moment for an impostor to pursue, which could not be obtained without exposing himself to almost certain detection. If Zacharias had even so laid his *principal* plan with regard to *John*, for the sake of which only he could set himself to contrive any other, as to make some associates necessary for its prosecution; the great danger of attempting to procure any would certainly have made him alter his design. But, *in fact*, the suc-

success of the plot in question relating to *John*, such as we now find it, could scarcely be at all promoted by *any* testimony, besides that of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* themselves.

ALL that He could possibly desire, at the time of his son's birth, must have been, to establish the credit of that divine message, which, he affirmed, had been delivered to *Him* by an angel from heaven; and upon the authority of which, *John's* whole claim to inspiration was necessarily to depend. Now this divine message was published as having been delivered to *Zacharias alone*, and consequently could not admit of being attested by any other person whatever. All, therefore, that any accomplices could possibly do to strengthen the cause, was, to publish the accounts of other divine messages revealed to themselves; calculated to confirm the truth of *Zacharias's own* relation. But if his account of his vision should not be believed upon the strength of *his* assertion; enforced by so refined an artifice, as his pretended loss of speech, for a limited time only, in consequence of it; *Zacharias* could have no hopes of establishing its credit, by the testimony of *any other* persons, of *far less* weight and authority than himself.

At this time, it must be remembered, he was far advanced in years, and possessed the character of a man of true probity and religion. His sacred

profession likewise would of itself, in great measure, secure him from being thought capable of contriving a forgery of so heinous a nature. His *own* testimony therefore, he well knew, came so strongly recommended to the public, by his age, his profession, the general opinion of his virtue, and his seeming miraculous loss of speech, that if *This* alone proved unable to gain belief for the facts he related, the addition of one or two corroborating, but *far less* creditable, witnesses must be useless and vain. If the people disbelieved him *himself*, he knew assuredly, they must regard the rest as inferior accomplices in the same crafty design, and reject all their pretended revelations with disdain.

IN the mean while it is incredible, that Zacharias should imagine, the people would, at this time in particular, prove averse to the reception of such a revelation, as he made public among them: or consequently, that his own established character would now, more than ever, be insufficient to procure him their belief.

IN other nations indeed, whose histories pretended to no more, than a few uncertain accounts of divine interpositions; whoever had made public a revelation of this kind, might with good reason apprehend, it would require the testimony of more than one, to gain credit to such an imposture.

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But with the *Jews* the case was quite different. Their religious and civil history being woven together in the same records, and consisting of little else than a continued series of immediate revelations from God, authenticated in the most unquestionable manner; such divine interpositions were so far from appearing, to *their* apprehensions, strange or improbable, in the nature of the thing, that they were familiarized to the conceptions of even the lowest of the people.

THEY had been favoured likewise with a long succession of prophets, whose predictions had been verified, in the most signal revolutions of their state and nation; and on whose authority they now confidently expected the speedy manifestation of the Messiah. Their liberty too had been at length swallowed up by the Roman power, and they began more eagerly to look for the arrival of that long promised prince, with whom they expected nothing less than universal dominion. Thus impatiently were the Jewish nation at this time expecting the sudden appearance of their mighty deliverer.

AND could Zacharias apprehend, when the people were in such a temper as this, that they would be, *now*, more than ordinarily averse to believing any divine revelation, upon the report of

one of his profession, and established *good character*; and more particularly, a revelation which proclaimed the actual arrival of the Messiah's immediate forerunner? Could he think, that they would now at last begin to call in question the honesty of one, whose piety they had ever till this time revered? On the contrary, must he not rather have expected, that they would receive with joy the glad tidings of the Messiah's approaching manifestation; and, instead of now first suspecting *his* veracity, wait, with a pleasing hope, for the accomplishment of the prediction? And with this opinion, founded upon the well-known expectations of the whole people, joined with the consciousness of his own established character, it would be absurd to imagine, that so artful an impostor could foolishly run the risk of being almost inevitably betrayed, merely to procure associates, whose concurrence was so far from necessary, that they could not at all assist him in the execution of his supposed designs.

It has appeared then, that the supposed imposture of *Zacharias*, relating to *his own son*, was of so peculiar a nature, that he himself could not entertain hopes of procuring any associates in it, should he make the attempt; and must have been sensible, that if he could, it was next to certain they

they would betray him, long before the plot could be put in execution. It has appeared likewise, that he could not but believe, that his *own* character was sufficient to bear him out; or, if *That* should prove insufficient, that the assistance of any associates, he could procure, would be still *more unable* to support his cause. And farther we have seen, the supposed plot *itself*, if there was one, was so contrived, that in fact he stood in need of no associates at all.

FROM all these particulars we cannot but draw this conclusion, that if *Zacharias* had been a wicked deceiver, and the contriver of such a false revelation concerning *his own son*, he certainly would not have set on foot, at the same time, *any other* conspiracy, which would oblige him to reveal to any one his *chief* design, relating to *John*. *This* must have been his *only* attempt; and his wife *Elizabeth* would have been found the only person concerned with him, in carrying this on. And consequently, since it has before indisputably appeared that *two other* persons, *Joseph* and *Mary*, were as intimately concerned in the whole transaction relating to *John*, as *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth themselves*; and likewise, that they were *All* engaged together, at the same time, in *another* similar transaction relating to *Jesus*; we are reduced to the necessity

necessity of acknowledging, that there could be *no imposture at all* in the case; or at least, that *Zacharias and Elizabeth* could not be the original contrivers of *Both* the plots, if any such iniquitous deception can *still* be supposed.

SECTION V.

If Zacharias and Elizabeth could have been the authors of such a double imposture, they could not have applied to Joseph and Mary, to take part with them in carrying it on.

HAVING proceeded thus far in proof of *Zacharias's* innocence of the impostures in debate, in order to place the incredibility of his having contrived them, in that clear and strong light, which the nature of the case allows, it will now be necessary to take some more particular notice of *Joseph* and *Mary*, who, we have seen, must from the beginning have been privy to *Zacharias's* designs.

For the present then, let us wave all that has been proved to the contrary, and still suppose it possible for *Zacharias* to have contrived both the plots in question; and to have resolved to run the hazard of procuring some associates to carry them on. After all, it will yet be found, that *Joseph* and *Mary* were in several, the most material, circumstances, persons absolutely unfit for his designs;
such

such, as it is utterly inconceivable he should venture to make acquainted with his plots, or in the least expect to assist him in them; and *such*, indeed, as he could by no means think capable of ever consenting to abet them.

A MORE unanswerable argument cannot be desired, to shew the impossibility of Zacharias's singling out *Mary*, for a confederate in the conspiracies supposed, than the consideration of *her youth*.

THE most authentic writers inform us, that marriage was, strictly speaking, so truly universal among the *Jews*, that they esteemed it an absolute command of God, which every man was indispensably obliged to comply with, as soon as he came to years of maturity. That, on this account, it was reputed among *them* highly sinful, for a man to remain unmarried after he was arrived at *twenty years of age*. And that, in consequence of this opinion, the men were all married *by that time*, and generally *sooner*; and *the women even much younger still*. For though a positive command laid upon the man only, was thought sufficient; and therefore they did not hold, that a similar command was laid upon the woman also; yet we are assured, what indeed will scarcely be doubted, that in fact the *women* were always married, at first, *much younger* than the *men*. They were generally

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rally *betrothed*, when only *ten* years old; and even *married*, in the higher ranks, extremely young. And judging upon a very fair average, we may believe their nuptials were completed *about the age of fifteen*, at the latest, through the whole body of the people*.

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* As this is a point of no small importance in the question, and the facts here asserted are so different from what obtains in this part of the world; it will be proper here to establish the truth of them, by more good authorities than one.

“The *Jews* are very warm assertors of the honour and sanctity of marriage; they extol it infinitely above a single life, and hold it a condition more suitable to nature, more advantageous to mankind, and more acceptable to God; so that they admit of no unmarried sect among them; but, on the contrary, look very jealously upon such of their nation, as either marry not at all, or long defer it. “Wedlock they esteem among the affirmative precepts, which they make obligatory upon their whole nation. Every male coming to years of maturity, is bound to take a wife to increase his family.—Upon this account their espousals are very early, their daughters being usually betrothed at ten years of age; and if they are rich, are married very young.” Lewis’s Heb. Antiq. b. vi. 35.—See also particularly, b. vi. 24.

“The *Jews* are obliged to marry, because God’s precept to the first man, of peopling the earth, “increase and multiply,” still continues in all its force. “Woe to the man who lives in a house without a wife.” They come not under this law till they are twenty years of age; “but then they must marry, otherwise they sin against God and his ordinance. They become murderers; they destroy the image
“ of

THIS being the case, we are warranted to conclude, that at the time, when Zacharias must have singled

"of the first man; and cause the Holy Spirit to withdraw himself from Israel." It is a question in the Talmud, "Who is he that prostitutes his daughter?" and the answer is, "the father that keeps her too long at home, or marries her to an old man."—The *Jews* do not generally wait twenty years. They make contracts betwixt their children betimes, and execute them as soon as possible.—In the mean time, a daughter married by her father, *before she is twelve years old and a half*, has the privilege of separating upon a simple disgust at her husband, because she was not then at the age of choosing."—Bafnage's Hist. of the Jews, b. v. 19.—For want of the original I have quoted from Taylor's translation.

"Certainly among the *Jewish* nation, they were so far from accounting the vow of virginity a piece of devotion and religion, that they accounted it a reproach for a woman to be childless; nay, a reproach for a woman not to be married."—"And a greater reproach it was for a woman not to be married."—Nay, the Jews, in their traditional law (by which they were led too much), did not only account it *a shame not to be married*, but *a sin*, and a breach of God's command. For those words (Gen. i. 28), "be fruitful and multiply," they account not only a blessing, but a *command*; and reckon it the first command of the six hundred and thirteen commands that are in the law."—Lightfoot, Vol. II. p. 1216.

On another occasion he quotes the following passage from Maimon.—"The man is commanded concerning begetting and multiplying, but not the woman. And when doth the man come under this command? *from the age of sixteen or seventeen years*. But if he exceeds twenty years without marrying,

singled out *Mary*, as a proper person to assist him in carrying on his impious designs, and one whom he

ing, behold he violates, and renders an *affirmative precept* vain." —Lightfoot, v. ii. p. 757.

" Amongst the people of the *Jews*, the desire of issue made them marry very young: *most of the men were married at eighteen years of age.*—Alex's Reflec. on the four last books of Moses, ch. 20.

" *Masculi omnes tenentur uxorem ducere, ubi attigerunt sexdecem aut septemdecem annos.*"—"The men are all obliged to marry, when they arrive at *seventeen or eighteen years of age.*" Lamy, App. Bibl. p. 140.—"At *eighteen* a son is to marry." Lewis's Heb. Antiq. b. v. ch. 39.

In confirmation of these authorities a great variety of regulations, which were observed among the *Jews*, prove the earliness of their marriages beyond all dispute.—It was provided, that a woman *betrothed before she was twelve years old*, could not be taken to her husband's house without her own consent, *till she was twelve complete.*—If a woman was completely *married before the age of twelve and a half*, she might obtain a divorce, upon a simple disgust. *A man of thirteen years of age, and a woman at twelve and a half*, was at full liberty to enter into a contract of marriage without the consent of parents or guardians.—If a woman was *betrothed before the age of twelve*, she had a power of *deferring the marriage for a twelvemonth*; whenever the husband *proposed* to her to complete it.—If *betrothed at the age of twelve and a half*, she might put off the *marriage till she was a year older.* But if she was *thirteen and a half, or older*, at the time of *betrothing*, she had *no power* to delay the marriage for more than *thirty days*, after the man *proposed* to her the completing of their marriage.—If the man deferred the

he supposed likely to undertake the part he intended for her in them, *She could not be more than about fourteen years of age.*

FROM the history itself it plainly appears, that even *after* the birth of *John*, which must have been near a twelvemonth after Zacharias's *first* application to *Mary*, she was still only *betrothed*, not yet *married* to *Joseph*. "The birth* of Jesus Christ was on this wife. When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph; before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost." In consequence of which it follows, that "Joseph was minded to put her away privately." But it is plain likewise, that *Joseph* was not apprized of *Mary's* situation till just *after* the birth

the completion of the marriage, longer than the expiration of these legal times (except in cases of necessity), he was bound to *support* the woman he had *betrothed*, till he finally *married* her.

These peculiar regulations prove clearly, that *from before the age of ten, to about thirteen years*, was the period, in which the *women* among the *Jews* were customarily *betrothed*. And when we consider this, jointly with the authorities just produced, it cannot be doubted, but that marriage was, strictly speaking, universal among the *Jews*; and that in naming even *the age of fifteen years* for that limit, in which the *Jewish women* were *first married*, we have allowed, at the least, full as long a period as the case can require.

* Matt. i. 18.

of *John*. For upon the angel's appearing to *Mary*, and informing her *, as we are told, that her cousin Elizabeth was then six months gone with child; *Mary*, we find, immediately left her own home, to go to Elizabeth; "and abode with her three months, till her full time came, and she brought forth a son †." Then it was, at her return home from Elizabeth, upon the birth of John, and while her marriage with *Joseph* remained yet to be completed, that *He* became acquainted with her pregnancy, and began to think of putting her away. Nor did he take her home to his own house, which was part of the matrimonial ceremony among the Jews, till at least some little time after this; when, as he asserted, the angel had appeared to him, and told him, to fear not to take unto him *Mary* his wife ‡. From all which it is abundantly evident, that even so late as after the birth of John, *Mary* was not yet actually married to *Joseph*; though they had been for some time betrothed to each other.

It has been proved already §, that *Joseph* and *Mary* must have been engaged by *Zacharias* in his designs, if they were engaged in them at all, before the time of his own vision in the temple. It

* Luke i. 36.

† Idem. i. 56, 57.

‡ Matt. i. 20.

§ See pages 58—67.

is indeed apparent, from the nature of the case alone, that he who had such an extraordinary part to play, and made use of so much refined artifice at the opening of the plot, must certainly have taken care to secure such associates, as he had made absolutely requisite for its success, before the time, when the plan was actually to be put in execution. So that it appears, *Zacharias* must have singled out *Mary*, as a person both likely and proper to carry on that imposture he had contrived; and must have communicated to her his whole design; and actually have engaged her to assist, as she afterwards did, in the prosecution of it, about a twelvemonth, at least, before her marriage with *Joseph* was completed; at which time she could scarcely be more than between fourteen and fifteen years of age.

With regard to *Mary* then, the argument is reduced to this short question; whether this can be allowed a probable; or even a possible supposition? Whether it is conceivable, that an such impostor, grown grey in the practice of fraud and dissimulation, and skilled in all the artifices necessary to carry on a deceit; as *Zacharias*, if a deceiver, must have been; should esteem a girl, who was not arrived at the full use of her understanding, a fit person to carry on a long and intricate train of the most impious impostures?

Whether,

Whether, in short, he who had rejected such a design as his knew was incapable of being entered into by *any*, who had not their consciences seared with the long practice of iniquity, in all its shapes should single out one, as a likely person to approve and abet it; whose youth, and sex*, and inexperience of this world, would necessarily make her terrified at the mention of so villainous a proposal, and shocked at the monster, who could attempt to seduce her into it?

It was the custom for parents among the Jews, never to let their virgin daughters go out of their houses, which custom made them be called *concealed*, in opposition to those that went abroad; that is, that were prostitutes. — Allix on the Old Testament, Vol. I. c. 20.

To the same purpose, Lamy, Appar. Biblicus, c. 10. "Virgines multa cura servantur abditæ in domos; et virgo dicitur hebraice, *gnalema*, hoc est, abscondita."

"The virgins are with great care kept concealed within doors, from whence a virgin is called in Hebrew, *gnalema*; that is, *hidden*."

"The daughters are instructed by the mothers, with great care, in the business that belongs to their sex. They were seldom allowed to go abroad; and on this account a daughter in the Hebrew language is called *Alma*; which signifies as much as a person *concealed*; and *close confined*." — Lewis's Hist. Antiq. v. 4. p. 83.

"For though it is true that the daughters of the Jews were seldom allowed to go abroad, yet it is not in the least probable that they were so much as to be called *concealed*."

"The daughters of the Jews were seldom allowed to go abroad; and on this account a daughter in the Hebrew language is called *Alma*; which signifies as much as a person *concealed*; and *close confined*." — Lewis's Hist. Antiq. v. 4. p. 83.

THESE surely are questions we cannot hesitate how to answer. We may with confidence pronounce it *morally* impossible, for him, who, if detected, was sure to pay for his villainy with his life, voluntarily to lay it open to one, whose youth and inexperience absolutely *disqualified* Her from giving him assistance; and whose timidity, and native abhorrence of such crimes, would in *all human probability* induce her to publish them to the world.

NOTHING can render it possible for Zacharias to have pitched upon a person *so young as Mary*, to make a confederate in *such* a scheme, or account for Her engaging in it, but the supposition, that she had already given very plain proofs of so profligate a disposition, that it might naturally be supposed, she was capable of entering into any villainous enterprise, he could possibly propose to her. A supposition on all accounts absurd, and impossible to have been true.

HAD this been the case, it must certainly have been much better known at *Nazareth*, the place where *Mary* * lived, than it could be to *Zacharias*, who dwelt at *Hebron* †, which was a great dif-

* Luke i. 26.

† It is a generally received opinion, that Zacharias dwelt at Hebron—"For though it is true indeed, the priests after the return from Babylon were not all disposed and placed in

distance off *. But had the neighbourhood, where Mary resided, known, or only suspected, her to have been guilty, not of any enormous crimes only, but of any vicious conduct whatever, it would unquestionably have been reported about, and her reputation destroyed; at least as soon as she began to set up for a publisher of divine revelations, and *the most honourable mother of the Messiah*. The pleasure, which people of all ranks and stations are universally found to take, in exposing the faults and failures of all within their knowledge, especially when they make pretensions to something more excellent than all about them, will not allow us to suppose, that, if *Mary* had given signs of so bad a disposition, those who lived near, and were upon a level with her, would have suffered her to escape without this public condemnation.

Her inferior rank in life too will not suffer us to imagine, that she could have been guilty of

all those very same dwellings they had possessed before the captivity; yet is it probable that Zachary, who was of the seed of Aaron, being here said to dwell in the hill country of Judea, might have his house in Hebron, which is more peculiarly said to be the city of Aaron's offspring, Josh. xxi. 11.—Lightfoot no Luke i. 39. Vol. II. 386. Allix on the N. T. 198.

* The hill country of Judea was about seventy miles from Nazareth, where Mary lived. Macknight's Comment on his Harmony, sect. 4.

such crimes, and yet have found means to conceal them. In the more exalted stations wealth may sometimes supply means and opportunities of concealing our true characters; and such actions as are not fit for the public view. But *That* class of the people, who are obliged to labour for their support, and in which the intended wife of Joseph was, are destitute of such resources. Their habitations, and the general tenour of their lives, are so far, at least, unavoidably exposed to the observation of all about them, that they cannot go any considerable lengths in vice, without bringing themselves into general suspicion at least, if they are not even actually detected.

It is therefore utterly inconceivable, that *Mary* could already have been guilty of any thing so bad, or indeed of any bad conduct at all, which could make Zacharias believe her *capable of* undertaking so iniquitous a part, as he must have designed her to act, without having become proportionably *infamous*; or at least of a *very suspicious* character, in the neighbourhood where she lived. Whereas we have sufficient reason to believe, that no objections were ever raised to *Mary's* virtue and integrity.

If any could have been urged, as they would unquestionably have been made public, and handed down to us; so would they have rendered *Mary* *absolutely unfit* for Zacharias to have applied to,
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for an associate in his plot. Had her character been in the least degree suspicious, any apparent connection with *Her*, in a series of amazing events, great part of which were so circumstanced, as to depend upon *her* veracity for their only immediate proof, at that time, must unavoidably have made every one apprehensive of some deceit. The supposition of *Mary's* being engaged by *Zacharias* to carry on his supposed imposture, is therefore plainly inconsistent with, and destructive of itself. It necessarily supposes *her* reputation to have been suspicious, at least, in order to account for his judging her a proper person to carry on his designs; though it is evident, that the least imputation upon her character, must have made his associating with her, the readiest way to prevent his success.

As for *Zacharias himself*, we have already seen, he had always found means to support an exemplary character. For *Him* therefore to have picked out an associate, whose integrity was looked upon as of a dubious nature; would have been purposely lessening his authority, and foolishly bringing his established credit into question. A conduct, it must be owned, too apparently absurd, to suppose him *capable* of pursuing; and which the event has shewn he did not in fact adopt, had he been capable of it. Had *Mary's* integrity been

but of a questionable nature, the Jewish rulers, who had never hearkened to *John*, and at length crucified *Jesus*, would not have failed to expose *her*, with the utmost virulence and malice. This they would assuredly have done, to convince the people of the wisdom of their own conduct, and to shew them, that the whole series of miraculous events, attested both by *Zacharias* and *Her*, were, at the bottom, nothing better than a most audacious imposture.

IN short, to render it possible for *Zacharias* to have attempted making *Mary* an accomplice in the plot supposed, we must resolutely maintain the truth of one or other of the following most absurd suppositions.

EITHER *Mary*, while she was yet quite a girl, and before she was betrothed to *Joseph*, must have been guilty of *such* crimes as shewed her to be fit for *Zacharias's* designs : and these crimes, though well known to *Zacharias*, who lived at a considerable distance from Nazareth, were never, at any time, so much as suspected in the very place where *She herself* resided.

OR else her wicked conduct was *really well known* to her neighbours and acquaintance at Nazareth ; but they were *all* so firmly attached to her interest, and the two grand impostures she so soon engaged in, that *not one* of them ever betrayed
the

the least hint of her misdemeanors, even though the laying open her true character, would certainly have been recompensed with very great rewards.

Or, thirdly, though *Mary* had actually gone great lengths in iniquity, neither *Zacharias*, nor *any one else*, had any cause to suspect it; and yet *Zacharias* pitched upon *Her* for acting a principal part in his plot; and imparted it to her, without any reason whatever for imagining she could be capable of entering into it.

Or, in the last place, *Mary's* conduct had really been *irreproachable*, till *Zacharias* thus unaccountably laid open to her his flagitious designs; but then, *all at once*, she willingly conspired with him, in publishing the most impious forgeries, for divine revelations; and ever after continued so hardened and undaunted, as never to make the least confession, or acknowledgment of her crimes.

SUCH are the conditions, and the *only* conditions, on which it is allowed us to believe, that *Zacharias* attempted to make *Mary* a confederate in the prosecution of his supposed imposture; and that *Mary* really became an accomplice with him in it. But as each of these conditions abounds in absurdities, impossible to be admitted; it must at length be acknowledged, that, had *Zacharias*

charias actually planned such an imposture, he could not have applied to *Mary*, to assist him in carrying it on; nor *Mary* have complied with his proposal; if he had. And since it is likewise undeniably plain; that *Mary* was as much a *principal* in the whole transaction, as *Zacharias himself*; we are obliged to confess, from the evidence of incontrovertible facts, that the two impostures supposed must be all a mere groundless imagination; or, at least, that *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* could not be the authors of them *Both*, if in fact there could be any deceit at all in the case.

With regard to *Joseph*, we cannot argue in exactly the same manner as we have concerning *Mary*, because *his* age, at the time of his marriage with *Mary*, is a disputed point. The majority indeed suppose her to have been his *first* wife; in which case we might safely rely upon his being scarcely above twenty years old*, at the time when *Zacharias* must have applied to *Him* likewise to take part in his plot. But some authors not only imagine him to have been married, and to have had children before this time, but have even thought he was already a very old

* As will appear upon considering the conclusion established from p. 58, to p. 67; together with the particulars contained in the note p. 169, & seq.

man *. However, choose which of these opinions we please, either of them will afford us sufficient evidence of the incredibility of *His* being applied to by *Zacharias*, to assist in his supposed imposture.

.. If we embrace the *first* supposition, and the most commonly received, his *youth* itself, considered in all its consequences, which need not here be insisted on, will be such a circumstance, as is alone sufficient to render *Zacharias's* applying to *Him*, with the design in question, very highly improbable. Suppose him, with the other side, very far *advanced in years*; and it will be but plunging into one insuperable difficulty, in order to get clear of another. The *older* we suppose him to have been, the more glaringly impossible it must appear, for one in his low station of life; and who, before he could be thought capable of conspiring in such a deceit, must have been well hardened in the practice of vice; to have kept his true character so effectually concealed, that not even his enemies should ever call his integrity in question. Yet this it is certain he must have done, since the evangelist has not hesitated to

* See Epiphanius, as referred to by Lardner, Vol. IV. pp. 315, 316, of The Complete Edition of his Works. For the more received opinion, consult Grot. on Matt. xxiii. 55. Lightfoot, Vol. I. p. 268.

affirm,

affirm, he was a *just man**; and the Jews have never contradicted the assertion; notwithstanding we know very well how desirous they must have been to blast his reputation. And to this we must add, that if *Joseph* was now *eighty* years of age, as some authors report, or even many years younger; all the various absurdities of *his* entering into so *tedious* a plot, as that in question, must have appeared so obvious to *Zacharias*, as well as *Joseph himself*; that it is clearly incredible He could apply to *Joseph* to take part in it, or that *Joseph* could have consented to it, if he had.

It must therefore be given up as an incredible imagination, that *Joseph* could be seduced by *Zacharias* to take part in the conspiracy in question; or else we must maintain, that even more moral impossibilities, than those which have just now shewn the fallshood of this supposition, with regard to *Mary*, ought not to be allowed their natural weight and influence, in determining its credibility with relation to *Joseph*.

BUT besides, can any thing be much more improbable, than that a *Jewish priest*, who had conceived a design no less ambitious, than that of setting up his own son for the *Forerunner* of the *Messiah*, should choose for his associates in the

* Matt. i. 19.

prosecution of such a plan, persons of so *obscure* a station as *Joseph* and *Mary* were? Could the same man, who was capable of forming so iniquitous a device, to gratify an unbounded pride and ambition, choose to be connected, in the prosecution of it, with an *obscure carpenter* and his wife? Nothing could induce him to single out such assistants as these, had his favourite plot really stood in need of *any*; but his imagining, either, that it would be more difficult to procure any confederates of a higher rank in life; or that, if they could be found, their assistance would not be so likely to gain success to his undertaking. But as to the *first* of these suppositions, how could he imagine, that the lower ranks of the people *only* were capable of furnishing him with associates in such a villainous imposture? It has never been supposed, that the *plain fundamental* principles of moral honesty and religion, are not as well known to the mechanic and artificer, and have not as general an influence over them, at least in such cases, where guilt would be highly flagrant, as they are to, or have ever, those who are placed in much higher stations of life.

AND if there is not even an imaginary connection between industry, and falsehood, or impiety, and an humble station; certain it is, there are *some* vicious undertakings, which those who labour

labour for their support, are rendered much more unlikely to enter into, by their very situation itself. Such, above all others, are those iniquitous plots, which owe their birth to *insatiable ambition*; the very nature of the *supposed imposture* before us. The sphere, in which men act, prescribes in great measure, the limits of their attempts. It sets bounds to the dangers they dare encounter, and the prize they will encounter them to obtain. The forging of divine revelations, in order to set up a counterfeit of the promised *Messiah*, was a project too far removed above the views of a common carpenter, to make it probable he could be at all desirous of entering into it, as well as too difficult and dangerous an attempt, for one in his *low station* to care to engage in, and what he-wards it had to offer. Whereas it was, for *such*, a design not unworthy the enterprising ambition of those in the more exalted spheres of life; and consequently far more likely to engage them in its pursuit.

WHAT motive then could possibly determine *Zacharias* to attempt procuring his associates, from so low a rank of the people? Could he think, that the influence of such as were of some figure and fashion, would not so effectually contribute to crown his enterprize with success? On the contrary, it is apparent, that the assistance of those,

these, whole rank would secure them from contempt, was what an impostor embarked in such a cause, must have been particularly desirous of. The strongest testimony of an *obscure mechanic*, in matters relating to the highest points of divine revelation, *Zacharias* well knew, was likely to have but little weight indeed; with the *laughing* nature of any of those sects, into which the Jews were divided; and by some of which the whole people were held as slaves, in bondage. Neither could *Zacharias* expect to find, in the narrow sphere of *Joseph's* rank and education, that comprehensive faculty, and refined dissimulation, so necessary for carrying on such intricate impostures; less scarcely to be acquired without a more cultivated, and general intercourse with various notions of mankind. Nor is it ever to be remembered, that in the mean time, it can scarcely be believed, that any one could have travelled so long direct high roads of iniquity, as *Zacharias*, if he was the contriver of this plot, must have done, without some faithful companion, to divide the dangers, and share the rewards of his crimes. At least, if this could otherwise be believed, so long as we suppose *Zacharias* to have sought but for an associate, on the present occasion, we shall find ourselves obliged to grant, that he must frequently have done so before. If, in this many wicked plots

plots he must have devised and executed before *this*, he had made it his invariable rule, never to admit a partner into his counsels, for fear of discovering at length his true character and conduct, it will be absurd to suppose, that he should *now*, after all, so foolishly lay himself open to detection, in the very wickedest, and most hazardous, of all the attempts he could ever have undertaken; and, above all, *the most likely to be betrayed*.

His being supposed to have sought out for associates *at this time*, plainly implies, therefore, that he must have done so *before*, on many other occasions; and, consequently, that he must have had some approved fellow-workers of iniquity, from whose former fidelity he had good reason to think, that whether they joined in his present design or no, *they*, above all others, would not betray him. *These*, therefore, if still living, must have been the persons he would have applied to; and whom, if any, we should have found acting their parts in this imposture. For, if *they* should have thought it too hazardous, and unpromising an enterprize to engage in, *Zacharias* could not have imagined any others would risk their safety upon it. And even if he had already outlived all his faithful accomplices, it was now much too late in life to incur the danger of making more. Yet certain it is, that *Mary* was a *principal* in the whole

whole transaction before us; and as certain, that *She*, who was then *scarce fifteen years of age*, could not be one of those long-tried associates of him, who must at this time have been so old a practitioner in the arts of deceit. Her *youth* alone, not to repeat here any other circumstance of her character and situation, renders it absolutely impossible, that she could.

IN one word therefore, to close the evidence that has been produced on this head, it has plainly appeared, that if *Zacharias* was the contriver of *Both the conspiracies* in question, and seduced *Joseph* and *Mary* to act the parts they sustained in them; in the first place, he must *knowingly* have exposed himself to *almost certain* destruction, by adding the plot concerning *Jesus* to *that* relating immediately to *John*, as by this means only he laid himself under a necessity of making known his villainous designs, in order to procure accomplices to carry them jointly on; and this, notwithstanding his *first* and *favourite imposture* was so contrived, that its success was rendered more precarious, by being connected with the *Other*, than it would have been *alone*. In the next place, to crown the whole, he must *purposely* have singled out *such* persons, to apply to for their assistance, in this *double imposture*, whose *youth* and *character*, whose *every circumstance* in life, rendered them, *he well*

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knew,

knew, the most likely persons *to reject* his proposals, and *betray* his villainy; and even should they not, the *least capable* of promoting their success.

BUT as these are suppositions, which it is evidently impossible to admit, we may at length venture to affirm, that the existence of *any such plots*, as these in debate, is a mere groundless imagination; or, at least, if they did exist, that *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* could *not* be the *original contrivers* of *them Both*, and for the sake of promoting the success of *One*, have procured *Joseph* and *Mary* to undertake the prosecution of the *Other*.

SECTION VI.

Neither Zacharias nor Elizabeth, on the one part, nor Joseph and Mary, on the other; could contrive Each their respective plots in this double imposture; nor could Joseph and Mary be the contrivers of the whole joint undertaking.

THE *first* of these three suppositions we were obliged to make *, in order to account for the existence of the impostures under consideration, having thus proved incredible, on *so many* accounts; let us now proceed to the *second*, and enquire whether it is possible.

“ THAT Zacharias might be the original projector of *that* design *only*, which immediately related to *his son*; and Joseph and Mary, in like manner, the contrivers of the *other* scheme, in favour of their *own*.”

HAD this been the true state of the case, since it has been seen, that *They* were *All*, from the beginning, engaged together in the joint prosecution

* See page 68.

tion of *Both* impostures, it will unavoidably follow,

EITHER that *Zacharias* made known *his* design *first* to *Joseph* and *Mary*, and that, in consequence of it, they then made him acquainted with *theirs*; or, that *They first* disclosed *their* intended plot to *Zacharias*, in hopes of procuring his assistance in *That alone*; upon which *Zacharias* laid open to *Them* the scheme he himself had in view; and thus, which ever might happen to be the case, *They All* immediately agreed to support each other in the joint prosecution of *Both*.

If each party contrived their own plot, one of these suppositions must have taken place. But a slight attention to some material circumstances will presently make it appear, that neither of them can be true.

WITH regard to the *first*, which supposes *Zacharias* to have laid the scheme concerning *John only*, and to have applied to *Joseph* and *Mary*, to join with him in the prosecution of *That alone*, nothing can be more plain, than that every argument which has been already alleged, to shew that *Zacharias* could not be the author of *both* designs; or, if he had been, that *He* could not have applied to *Joseph* and *Mary* to conspire with him in *Both*; remains as strong as *before*, upon *this* supposition; nay, and proves even more forcibly, that

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that he could not have imparted to them *One* of these supposed designs, had he been the contriver of *One only*.

HE could not have been wicked enough to be capable of a contrivance for counterfeiting the Messiah's *Forerunner*, without having been equally capable of setting up an impostor, even under the character of the *Messiah himself*. If his advanced age, his religious profession, and his singular good character, considered in all their unavoidable consequences, prove it utterly incredible, that he could be the author of two such detestable undertakings; they render it equally absurd to imagine he could be the planner of *Either*. If the length of time requisite to put in practice the supposed imposture relating to *John only*, is such a circumstance, as, when considered jointly with *Zacharias's* age, renders the supposition of *his* contriving it, not only unworthy of belief, but even *highly ridiculous*, it cannot stand in need of any other plot of the same kind, to make it still more incredible. If it has appeared likewise from considering *Mary's* youth, and the several other circumstances, both of *her* situation, and that of *Joseph*, that *Zacharias* cannot be conceived to have disclosed to *them, both* these designs, if he had contrived them *Both*; the same reasons will make it equally incredible, that he could venture to lay open to them his iniquity

in *One* of these devices, if he was the real author of *One only*.

FROM what has been proved already therefore, without any thing further, it might here be allowable to conclude, that this *second* supposition, as far as relates to *Zacharias*, must in every particular be as false and as groundless as the *first*. But in reality, the evidence of *his* innocence will be found much stronger on *this* supposition than the *former*.

IN the first place, it is apparent from the nature of the thing itself, that if the plot relating to *John* was the *whole* of *Zacharias's* design, *Elizabeth* and *He* were the *only* persons at all requisite, and indeed the *only* persons *capable* of carrying it on, Had this been the case therefore, they would never have revealed their own impiety, as no use could attend it, to any person whatever. To imagine, that now at length *Zacharias* would voluntarily lay open his wicked intentions, when they neither required, nor indeed could admit of any management besides *his own*; and, above all, that he should thus betray himself to *such* persons, so circumstanced as *Joseph* and *Mary* were, purely to let them into the secret of his true concealed character, would be the most ridiculous and extravagant of all imaginations.

AGAIN,

AGAIN, while we supposed *Zacharias* to have contrived a plot for the *Son of another person*, as well as one for *his own*, it might, at first sight, appear possible to procure associates, by giving them hopes of great advantages to be drawn from the success of *their* Son. But if he had no design on foot, more than that relating to *John only*; even this appearance of a possibility of his procuring assistance from *Joseph* and *Mary*, had his plot really stood in need of it, is entirely vanished, and the supposition of his applying to them about it, becomes at once confessedly incredible.

CERTAINLY he could not hope to engage them in so dangerous, as well as iniquitous a design, without having at least some very specious emoluments to propose to them from its success. But what advantages could he make them imagine might probably result to *them*, should his supposed design in favour of *John only* prove ever so successful? And this is the *only* design we are now supposing him to have contrived. It might indeed be thought, that the parents of so distinguished a prophet, if they were still alive when the plot should take effect, would be held in veneration and esteem; and this was the utmost that even *they themselves* could hope for. But no benefit could be expected on this account by his *most distant* relations, and especially such as were

in so obscure a sphere of life as *Joseph* and *Mary* were.

GREATNESS and splendor were by no means the apparent objects of *this* design, even with regard to *John* himself; who, instead of affecting rule and authority over the people, was to teach them "the knowledge of salvation through the remission of their sins," and preach to them the baptism of repentance. And however successful he might be in imposing on them as a *prophet*, an attempt itself of no small difficulty and danger, it would still remain in the highest degree improbable, that he should ever be able to graft upon it the attainment of wealth and power.

IN nations overrun with a fabulous religion, and superstitious notions of the gods, the established credit of divine inspiration might, with reason, be expected to afford means of gratifying the most unbounded ambition. But among the *Jews* this was by no means the case. *Their* clear and established knowledge of God's immediate providence, and settled belief in his will, already revealed to them, freed them so effectually from this blind enthusiastic admiration of whoever might pretend to an extraordinary commission from above, as to make them, on the contrary, severe judges of all such pretensions. *They* had enjoyed likewise a long succession of persons, universally acknowledged as the most approved.

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approved prophets, who, though even workers of miracles in support of their claims, had neither sought for public honours, nor to aggrandize their fortunes, but persisted, to the last, in quite a private and reclusive situation. Nay, the *very Person*, whose life and manner *John* was professedly to imitate, according to *Zacharias's* own prediction, was one at least of the most eminent of them all, for the abstemiousness and privacy of his course of life.

It was therefore so far from being natural for a *Jew* to expect, that the *Jewish* people would be at all inclined to bestow wealth and honours, upon whomsoever they might actually esteem inspired from above; that, in reality, there was great reason to fear, they would begin to call in question the veracity of any one, and more especially of the professed imitator of *Elias*, as soon as he should begin to betray a desire of such kind of rewards.

BESIDES, *He*, above all others, who should appear as the *Forerunner* of the expected *Messiah*, could not propose to himself, or his adherents, any considerable advantages. The *Messiah* himself was the king, for whom the *Jews* so ardently wished, and whom they so soon expected. *He* it was, who, they believed, would establish them in an universal dominion. And the nearer they
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apprehended *his* arrival to be; that is, the more successfully any *pretender* to the character of his *Forerunner* should delude them into a belief in his *own* divine mission; the farther would they be from bestowing wealth and honours upon the pretended messenger *himself*. Their thoughts and expectations would unavoidably be suspended till the arrival of the *Messiah*, and for *him* they would reserve all their choicest gifts; while the *Messenger* and his adherents could have little or no hopes of profit or exaltation. If they should believe his report, it was naturally to be expected, that they would behave to him, as in fact it appears the *Jews* did to *John*, when they *did* believe *him*, and he peremptorily declared himself *only the harbinger* of the *Messiah*; that is, that they would reverence him as a *prophet*, but not think of exalting him as a *man*.

To suppose then, that *Zacharias* had *only this plot* in view, and yet that he disclosed it to *Joseph* and *Mary*, would be supposing him determined to make known to them his own unparalleled iniquity; though *They* could be *of no use* to *Him* in the execution of his plot; and it could *not* be of *any service* to *Them*, even if it should succeed. But this is a supposition too absurd to be received, since if *Zacharias* was *capable* of betraying himself in so foolish a manner, he must have been absolutely *incapable*

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capable of concealing his true character, and maintaining so good a reputation as he did, till he was well stricken in years.

BUT though, for all these reasons, it cannot be believed, that *Zacharias* could betray himself in so foolish a manner to *Joseph* and *Mary*; possibly *Joseph* and *Mary* might apply first to *Zacharias*, to procure his assistance in that imposture, which we are now supposing *Them* to have planned out for their *Son*.

AND here the question immediately occurs, for what reason could *They* apply to *Zacharias*, if they had only that plot in view, which related to their own *Son*? Could they be desirous of laying open their wicked intentions to him, when it was not in the least necessary to the prosecution of their design; and when they could not possibly imagine it capable of being at all beneficial to him? Was the impiety of setting up an impostor for the *Messiah*, less shocking than that of counterfeiting his *Forerunner*; that *They* should be more ready to lay themselves open to *Zacharias*, than *He* could be, as we have already seen, to expose himself to *Them*? Or, in one word, would not the folly and danger of this step have been so great, and so glaring, that it is impossible to conceive they could be capable of overlooking it? The plot itself, as has been before
fully

fully shewn*, was of so dangerous and discouraging a nature, so destitute of all prospects of advantage, and so much more likely to induce any one to *betray* than *promote* it, that it cannot be believed they could venture to impart it to any person whatever.

WAVING, however, these considerations, and supposing Them determined, though contrary to every motive by which they could possibly be determined, to make *somebody* privy to their intended imposture, still it would have been impossible for them to have fixed upon *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, above all others, to make acquainted with their plot.

NOTHING can be more inconceivable, than that they should single out a *Priest* of the *God of Israel*, grown venerable with years, and still more so by an unblemished reputation, as one who could be pleased with the authors of so iniquitous a device. They could not possibly hit on any person, *in their own opinions*, more likely to reveal their impiety immediately to the rulers, and publish it to the whole nation; and by this means procure them

* This must plainly appear, from considering all that has been seen of the unpromising nature of the design supposed with regard to *John*, jointly with the still greater difficulties and dangers, that must necessarily attend *this* relating to *Jesus*.

that

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that condign punishment they so highly deserved, and would have been sure to undergo. It must be ridiculous to suppose, they could expect any thing better at *his* hands, though their design had been such, as even to have tempted him with lucrative and ambitious views. And what then could they hope for, or how could they lay open their own guilt to *him*, above all others, when it was absolutely impossible, that *their* supposed *single* imposture in favour of *Jesus* could procure *Zacharias* any benefit at all?

BUT, insurmountable as these difficulties must be owned, the supposition we are examining, labours yet with one more, if possible, still greater than all the rest.

WE have seen long ago, that if there was any contrivance in the case, *all* the parties concerned must have been engaged together in it, even from the very *planning* of the whole joint transaction. If therefore *Mary* and *Joseph* communicated their *separate* design, *first*, to *Zacharias*, they must certainly have taken this step, *before* *Zacharias* actually counterfeited his vision in the temple. Now *this* event we know, from the order of the several facts, came to pass no less than *full six months* before even the *conception* of *Mary's* son. So that, on the supposition we are now considering, *Joseph* and *Mary* must have planned and communicated their
separate

separate design to Zacharias; nay, and they must all have determined, that Zacharias should actually proceed to begin his part in the joint undertaking, full six months before Jesus was conceived; and, consequently, as long before Mary had any actual prospect of a child, to act that part, they intended him afterwards to undertake. But this is an agreement so utterly incapable of being believed, that whatever supposition unavoidably includes it, must necessarily be false.

To say no more therefore upon this head, since it has so plainly and fully appeared, first, that Zacharias could not be the author of *Both* the plots in question together; nor, secondly, of *One* of them alone, while Joseph and Mary were the real contrivers of the *Other*; let us enquire in the last place,

“Whether Joseph and Mary may not have been the real contrivers of *both* parts of this double imposture, and have prevailed with Zacharias to undertake the prosecution of *One*, in hopes of some great advantages to be drawn from the joint success of *Both*.”

THIS is the only possible supposition remaining, and even this must be exploded, as well as the two former, unless it shall appear credible, in the first place, that Joseph and Mary could contrive two *such* designs; in the next, that they could

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could impart them to *Zacharias*, in hopes of his approving and becoming a principal in the joint prosecution of them; and lastly, that *He* could really engage in them, if they had. All these particulars must, upon examination, appear credible; or this last supposition, as it includes them all, must necessarily be rejected as incredible and absurd.

AND with regard to these particulars, absolutely necessary to be first established, not to enlarge upon arguments that have been already insisted on, it must by this time be fully evident, that neither of them can possibly be admitted. For if the ingenuity, artlessness, and timidity, natural to *Mary's youth*; the modest and reserved education of her sex; the good character, free from all aspersions, which *She* as well as *Joseph*, at this time enjoyed, and ever after maintained; together with the confined views, and inexperience of the world, necessarily occasioned by their low station in life; render it utterly incredible, that *They* could even have become parties to such impious and shocking contrivances, when planned by another, they must unquestionably prove it morally impossible for *Them* to have first contrived such impostures *Themselves*. After all then that has been said already, in proof of this point, the supposition of *Their* having been the true authors of
Both

Both these impostures, becomes so apparently extravagant, that it needs but to be mentioned, in order to be exploded.

Nor, in the next place, can any stronger arguments be desired, than what the sacred profession, advanced age, and exemplary character of *Zacharias*, have already furnished, to convince us of the impossibility of *his* being applied to, for assistance, in *any* wicked design whatever; and much more of his becoming a confederate in *these* above all others, had he actually been solicited to join in them.

HOWEVER, abundantly sufficient as the joint force of all these considerations is, to prove that *Joseph* and *Mary* could not be guilty of contriving *both* the plots in debate; the nature of the case will supply us with one argument more, which must needs put this point beyond possibility of dispute.

If *Joseph* and *Mary* were the real contrivers of *both* the supposed impostures, and, consequently, engaged *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* to act the part they afterwards did, in the prosecution of them; then *They* must in the beginning have laid open these designs to *Zacharias*, in hopes of inducing him to undertake the management of that half of the plot, which he afterwards carried on. And since it is manifestly impossible for *Zacharias* to have

have been *acting* his part, till after he had been thus solicited, and agreed to undertake it, *Joseph* and *Mary* must have applied to him on this account, and *He* must have agreed to their proposal, some time before he actually opened the plot, with his pretended vision in the temple. That is, in other words, *some time before even the conception of John*.

BUT what was the situation of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* at that time? *Elizabeth* had always hitherto continued absolutely *childless*, and both *She* and *Zacharias* were now too old, to entertain the least *hope* of ever having children. So that upon this supposition, *Joseph* and *Mary* must have solicited *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* to begin an imposture for the sake of *their own Son*, and they must have agreed to it with this view; not only at a time when they really had *no son*, but when they must likewise have been fully persuaded that they *never* should have any. But how was it possible, in such circumstances, for one party to make the application, or the other to comply with it? This at least, it must be confessed, was absolutely impossible, and the contrary supposition would have been evidently absurd.

HAD it therefore still remained a matter of doubt, whether *Joseph* and *Mary* might not have planned the two impostures in question; sure we

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are, *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* were so situated, that *They* could not have been applied to, to assist in carrying them on, nor have attempted to do it, if they had. Nor does this conclusion rest wholly, even upon a variety of the strongest *moral* proofs, but likewise, upon the clearest *natural* impossibility, that the contrary could be true.

IN fine, to conclude this argument, it appears not only certain, that *Joseph* and *Mary* were *incapable* of contriving such execrable plots; as well as from several circumstances of the last importance, that they certainly *did not* contrive those in debate; but likewise, that they could have no assignable motive whatever for setting such contrivances on foot.

THE only causes, which either obstinate infidelity can invent, or impiety suggest, to account for their concerting such a strange imposture, must be, either the hopes of *advantages* to accrue from the impostures themselves, or the desire of preventing all sarcastic reflections upon *Mary's unexpected condition*, before her marriage with *Joseph* was finally *completed*. But as to any advantages to be derived from the success of these impostures themselves, though the possibility of such hopes has been all along supposed, for the sake of allowing the supposition of their guilt every imaginable advantage; yet they have in fact appeared far too remote

remote and chimerical; and the dangers of the plots too great and imminent, to admit of any one's contriving them on such motives as these. After all that has now been seen, *this* account of the matter must necessarily be given up:

As for the remaining supposition, that the whole might be a contrivance to *save Mary's reputation*, the facts themselves will shew this to be, of all others, the most ridiculous, and indeed, strictly speaking, impossible. Nothing can be a more extravagant imagination, at first sight, than *this*; that a *carpenter* and his intended wife, should agree to set up a child of theirs, yet unborn, for a counterfeit of the great *Messiah*; and moreover attempt to persuade some one of their acquaintance, to set up another for his *Forerunner*; and all this *for no other end*, than merely to prevent their neighbours from throwing out reflections to their disadvantage.

BUT besides, if the saving of *Mary's* reputation was the point they aimed at, there was a certain, safe, easy, and effectual, method of doing it, which they could not possibly be ignorant of, or forget, and which therefore they would unquestionably have adopted, instead of setting themselves to contrive plots of so dangerous, fruitless, and strange a nature, as those before us. In a word, as it is plain, that they had been for some

time betrothed to each other, *before Mary's particular situation took place*, the mere completion of their marriage, upon the very first, slightest suspicion of it, would have secured *Her effectually* from all reproach, and was indeed the only expedient capable of doing it.

STILL the facts will supply us with another consideration upon this point, that can admit of no reply. Had *both* the plots been contrived by *Joseph* and *Mary*, to save her from disgrace, on account of her situation, before their marriage was complete, it is plain They themselves could not have settled the plan of them, till they had some reason to apprehend the state she might be in. At least, *this* must unquestionably be allowed, that *They* could not apply to *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* to undertake *one* of the joint plots they had contrived; and, above all, that *Zacharias* could not proceed to the actual execution of any public step in it, till *That event*, on account of which *only* the whole contrivance was agreed on, could be *certainly known* to have taken place.

THESE points considered, it must necessarily be acknowledged, that if *Joseph* and *Mary* contrived both these impostures, for the end now supposed, *Zacharias* could not have brought on his pretended vision in the temple, which must have been the public opening of the whole design, till
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at least some little time *after* Mary's particular situation had been fully *confirmed*.

Does it then in fact appear, that Zacharias did not begin the part he acted, with the vision just mentioned, till *Mary* might have been found with child, the very earliest period which the nature of the case can possibly admit? So far from it, that, on the contrary, we find, He pretended, at least, to have seen the vision in question, and to shew the *visible* effects of it, no less than *full six months** before *Mary* asserted she had seen a similar vision, and consequently, *as long* before even the *conception* of *Jesus*.

WE may therefore confidently pronounce it impossible for *Zacharias's* vision to have been the opening of a plot contrived by *Joseph* and *Mary*, and entered into by *Zacharias* at their instigation, in order to rescue *Mary* from reproach, on account of her being found with child, before her marriage with *Joseph* was completed. Because it was transacted so many months before the supposed occasion for it had any existence, to bring her character into question, and conse-

* That it was not possible to falsify the time of *Zacharias's* first appearing dumb, and pretending to have seen the vision just mentioned, or to forge the fact itself, if it had never happened; see proved more at large in pp. 156, 157, 158, &c. and the notes.

quently, before any imposture whatever could, on that account, be carried into execution.

At length then we may be permitted to affirm, that the supposition, that *Joseph* and *Mary* were the real authors of the *whole design*; and the seducers of those concerned with them in carrying it on, appears on various accounts absurd, and impossible to be true. And *this* supposition being what we were unavoidably driven to, as the very last * that could be made in support of any imposture at all, we are now under a necessity of laying aside all suspicion of any deceit in the case, as contrary to the clear evidence of a great variety of facts, and destitute of every the least rational foundation or support.

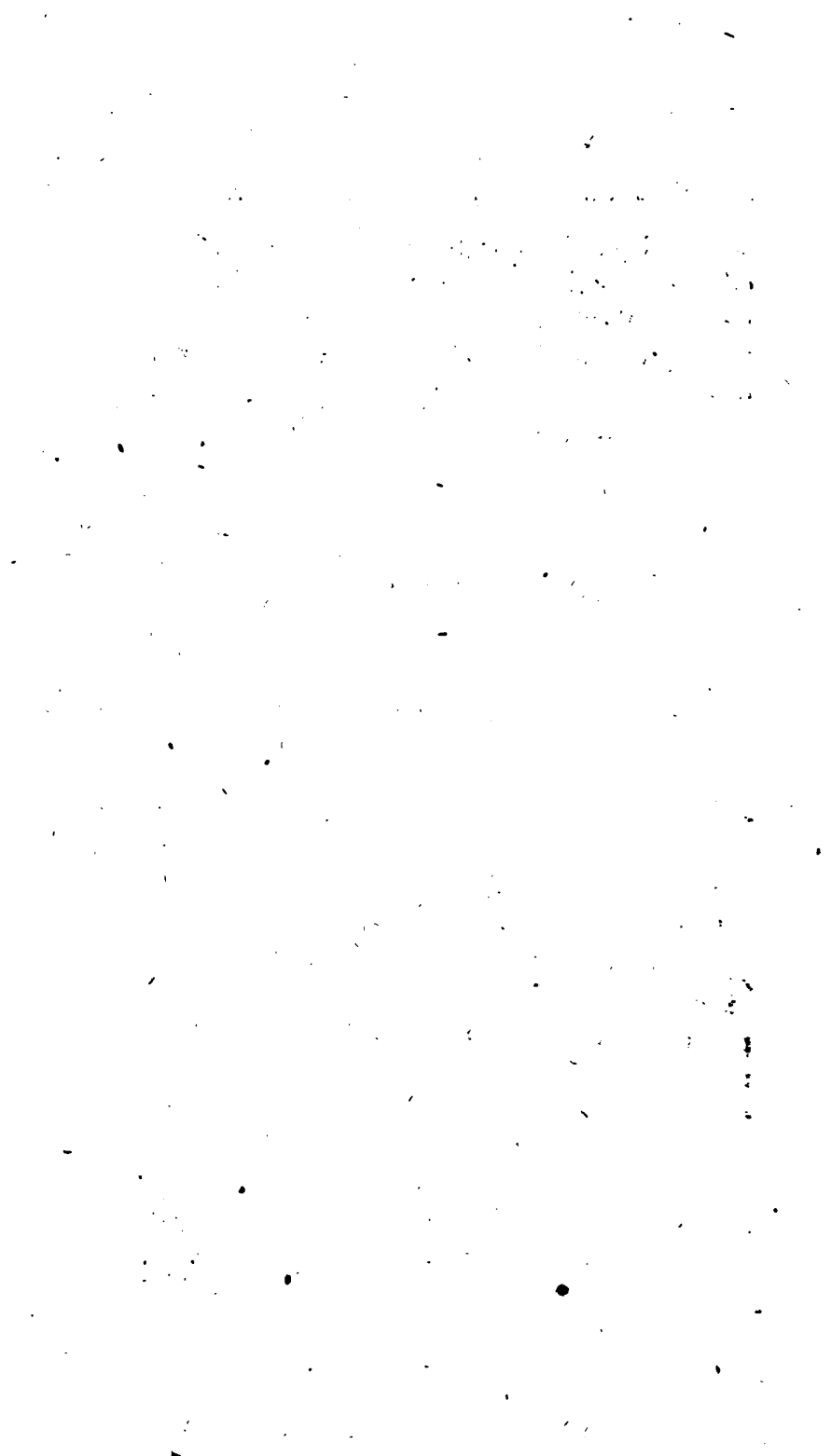
AND since it has appeared plainly, from the several *circumstances, situations, and characters*, of *All* the parties concerned in the transactions under consideration, that *neither Any of them alone, nor All of them together*, could contrive and enter upon such an imposture, as that in question, if it was one, must have been; we are indispensably bound to acknowledge, that the *conceptions*, and *births*; of *John the Baptist* and *Jesus Christ*, were *truly* accompanied with all those *miraculous* events, which the evangelists have recorded of them;

* See page 68.

and

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and consequently, that those *prophetic* and *divine* characters, which, agreeably to the angel's predictions, they afterwards assumed, were unquestionably their *true* characters, and what had been of old ordained for them by the stupendous providence of *God*.



THE
DIVINE MISSIONS
OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST
AND
JESUS CHRIST.

PART II.

SECTION I.

*The whole imposture in question is, in its own nature,
so exceedingly absurd, that it was not possible to
have been conceived or undertaken, by any person
whatever.*

THE circumstances and character of every
person at all concerned in the births of *John
the Baptist* and *Jesus Christ*, having, upon a close
examination, afforded so full a proof of their
divine missions and authority; let us now proceed
to consider, whether as strong an argument, in
support of the same conclusion, may not be drawn
from

from the *internal nature* of these remarkable events *themselves*, and the several subordinate transactions, that were either previous to, or any way connected with them. Upon an attentive consideration, perhaps the main facts themselves, as well as the circumstances attending them, will be found of so peculiar a nature; as to furnish the most convincing proofs we can desire, that they could not possibly arise from, or even admit of any imposture.

It is needless to repeat here the detail of *every* particular connected with the *main* events in debate, since the evangelist's own account of the whole series of these transactions has been quoted at large already*. We may therefore proceed at once to the examination of *such* particulars only, as seem fully sufficient to place beyond doubt the truth and certainty of all the rest. And this they will enable us to do, by shewing, first, "That the plot supposed is, in its own nature, so very ridiculous and absurd, that it is utterly inconceivable, any one could ever contrive or engage in it." And, in the next place, "that if we could suppose it capable of being undertaken, the expedients by which it appears it must have been carried on are such, as it is absolutely incredible could ever have been adopted."

* See page 15—20, and p. 59—61.

THE only foundation necessary to be laid, before we enter upon this argument, is so obvious a principle, that we may safely venture to suppose it will be very readily allowed. And this is, that

ALL IMPOSTORS MUST EVER BE SUPPOSED TO ACT UPON MOTIVES OF HUMAN CUNNING, AND TO GOVERN THEMSELVES BY VIEWS OF HUMAN FORESIGHT AND PROBABILITY. AND CONSEQUENTLY, WHENEVER A PLOT IN QUESTION WOULD, IF TAKEN FOR GRANTED, BE ABSOLUTELY DESTITUTE OF THE ONE, AND THE CONDUCT OF THE SUPPOSED IMPOSTOR BE FOUND OPPOSITE TO THE OTHER; THAT THEN RIGHT REASON AND COMMON SENSE OBLIGE US TO ACKNOWLEDGE, THERE COULD BE NO DECEIT IN THE CASE.

By this touchstone therefore let us now try the imposture in debate.

It is related, that an angel appeared to *Zacharias* in the temple, and foretold to him the conception, birth, and divine character of his son. That to punish him for mistrusting the truth of these predictions, as well as to convince him in the strongest manner of their divine authority, the angel at once struck him dumb; assuring him at the same time that he should continue thus deprived of his speech, till *that* son, whose birth he had then been forewarned of, should be actually born.

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That in a few days after this, when his ministration at the temple was over *, Zacharias returned home; "and after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived." That in fact Zacharias did continue *dumb*, till, in the natural course of time, *John* was accordingly born; and shortly after, agreeably to the angel's prediction, his speech was as instantaneously restored to him, as it had been before taken away.

THIS therefore now becomes the point in debate, whether the facts here related might not be so many particulars of a subtil imposture; or whether, that supposed imposture, of which only these particulars could be part, must not have been of so absurd a nature, that it is impossible to believe it could ever exist?

AND here, first, it is obvious, that Zacharias's pretending, at least, to have been suddenly struck *dumb*, at the particular time mentioned, is a fact which cannot have been forged; because, if true,

* The whole body of the Jewish priests was divided into twenty-four parts, called *courses*; each of which, in a fixed rotation, attended in the temple to perform the whole worship there, and the attendance of each course was a week at a time, and that twice in a year. Such was the ministration of Zacharias here mentioned, at the expiration of which he returned home from Jerusalem.—See Lewis's Heb. Antiq. b. ii. c. 7.

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great numbers must have been witnesses of it, and could not be deceived about it. More especially as it is affirmed to have happened on so remarkable an occasion, and in circumstances so particular, that it must unavoidably have engaged the attention of every one, who was present at the temple service at the time.

"ACCORDING to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense*, when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled, that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out he could not speak unto them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple, for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless †."

THIS was so remarkable an event in all its circumstances, that it could not but astonish every one present, and be immediately noised about through the whole city of Jerusalem. A vision

* "As the courses of the priests were (originally) decided by lot, so every particular priest had his office appointed him by the same method. The lot determined, who should attend the altar of incense, who should feed the fire, who carry out the ashes, and all other parts of the service."—Lewis, *ibid.*

† Luke i. 9, 10, 21, 22.

from heaven, appearing to a priest of venerable age, and exemplary character, while he was actually performing duty in the temple itself; and depriving him of *speech*, so as to *disable* him from going on with the most public, and *remarkable* part of his office, that of dismissing the people with their appointed *solemn blessing**, was an incident
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* This is a particular which deserves our especial notice; as it must have rendered Zacharias's apparent sudden loss of speech, so extremely remarkable, that not one person, who was then attending worship in the temple, could remain ignorant of it. "The people," we find, "waited for Zacharias," to come out from the holy place, where the incense was burnt, and *blest* them; for so the priests used to do after burning the incense. (See Lightfoot's Temple Worship, ch. 9. Lewis, b. iv. 19.) "And they marvelled that he tarried so long. And when he came out he could not speak unto them," to give them their accustomed blessing before they departed. "And they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple; for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless." Now *this* last part of his office, which Zacharias on this occasion appeared unable to perform, and actually did not perform, was *that* for which the Jews entertained a much greater veneration than any other.—"The *benediction* was to be pronounced by the priest, standing so that he might be seen, with his hands lifted up and spread, and speaking with a loud voice, with his face towards the assembly. This was the form of the blessing, as it was established by God himself (Numb. vi. 24, &c.). "The Lord blest thee and keep thee; the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up his countenance

so very uncommon, that those who were present would naturally make it known, and render it impossible for any one afterwards to publish such an account, had the fact never happened, or falsify the time on which it did.

AND besides this consideration, relating to the people in general, it must likewise be remembered, that the whole number of the Jewish priests was divided into several distinct bodies, each of which performed the worship at the temple, in

“ nance upon thee, and give thee peace.” When this benediction was said in the sanctuary, if we may believe the Jews, it was but one, and pronounced without any pause, the people keeping profound silence; but out of the sanctuary, in their synagogues, they made three of it; the priest pausing at the end of every verse, and the people saying *Amen*, to each of them.”

——“ The divine blessing was always supposed to depend upon the blessing of the priest, which they thought *so necessary*, that such priests as were admitted to *no other* service might perform *this*, lest the people should at any time want it. And it was a maxim, that *the blessing* pronounced by a priest who had some blemish in his body was always to be accounted lawful. There is nothing performed among the *Jews* with *so much solemnity*, and in which they place so much sanctity, as in this solemn *Benediction*.”—Lewis’s Heb. Antiq. l. ii. 7.—After this account of the solemnity of *that* part of his office, which *Zacharias* did not perform; signifying at the same time, to the whole congregation, that he had seen a vision and was *dumb*; we cannot need any other argument to convince us of the great notice, that must have been taken of it, by every one who was present at the time it came to pass.

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able of all the offices, which the ordinary priests had to perform; and as their numbers were so great,

the lot was drawn to determine the priest who should burn the incense, it was drawn by those only who had not burnt incense before. *The same person never burnt incense twice.*"—Sigon. Rep. Heb. l. iv. 23. Not. Ed. Nicolai.

"*Sacrificium juxta vespertinum iisdem ritibus quibus matutinum peragebatur, exceptis fortibus, quæ denuo non ducebantur, et benedictione; sed eadem functio iisdem mane et vespere obtingebat, si suffitum excipias, ad quem novo sortium ductu opus erat?*—The evening sacrifice was of course performed with the same forms as the morning, except the ceremony of drawing lots, and the blessing; every one discharged the same office in the evening, that had fallen to him in the morning, except the offering of incense; for which it always was necessary that some other person should be chosen."—Beland, Antiq. Heb. p. ii. c. 5. 5.

Lightfoot indeed makes mention of an exception, when the same person might burn incense twice: but this, it will immediately be seen, cannot in the least invalidate the argument we have drawn from the rule itself.—"In the evening they (the priests) cast not lots for their several employments, but those that the lot had assigned them in the morning they retained in the afternoon; "only about the matter of burning the incense they cast lots anew, amongst those of the house of the father, that served that day, that had NEVER burnt incense in their lives." But if all of them had, at one time or other, been upon that employment, then he that had it by lot at the morning service, did also perform it in the evening."—(Temple Worship, c. 9. near the end.)—Besides that this was the case, which, from what we have seen of the priestly families, could scarce ever happen, it

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great, none were suffered to draw lots for it, who had ever performed it before. As this therefore was so very particular an occasion, one even that had never happened to *Zacharias before*, and never could *again*; and as his apparent loss of speech rendered it impossible for him to officiate again in the temple, till a *twelvemonth* after this happened, and *three months* after the birth of *John*, there was not even a possibility left him, to falsify the *time* of his appearing, at least, to have been struck dumb in the temple, on the occasion related.

WHETHER then, for the present, we suppose this account of the angel's appearance and discourse to have been founded in truth, or a mere fiction, and consequently *Zacharias's* loss of speech *real*, or *pretended*, this we are bound to believe as an unquestionable *fact*, that *Zacharias* became in appearance *dumb*, on the *occasion*, and at the *time*

is plain that it could not happen at this time; because, if *Zacharias* appeared *dumb* in the morning, he could not possibly officiate again in the evening; and even if he could have done it, it is obvious, that the conclusion which this particular has been brought to establish, must remain as valid as before.

It may not be improper to add here one remarkable particular, that a priest, who had been guilty of any great crime; was *never after* permitted to perform *this* office. See *Reland*, as above.

related. And that was, as the evangelist has expressly informed us, some little time before the conception of John. For "it came * to pass, that " as soon as the days of his, *Zacharias's*, ministration were accomplished," during which he became dumb, "he departed to his own house; " and after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived."

SUPPOSING it possible then for Zacharias to have invented this refined expedient, and determined to make use of it, the more effectually to conceal his projected imposture, was it possible for him to put it in practice at this time? Or, on the contrary, will not the very time only of his apparent loss of speech unanswerably prove, that it could not be the effect of any such concerted design?

WE are expressly informed †, that *Elizabeth* had till this time continued absolutely barren; and both *She* and *Zacharias* were now so far advanced in years, that all thoughts of their having children must have been at an end. This being the case, though we should suppose him to have planned the whole contrivance, in question, years before; and to have been fully resolved to execute it, whenever an opportunity should offer,

* Luke i. 22.

† Luke i. 7—18.

still it will be *confessedly impossible* for Zacharias to have begun executing *this part* of the plot, at the soonest, till he knew with certainty, that *Elizabeth was actually with child*.

NOTHING can be more ridiculous in itself, or more inconsistent with so masterly a stroke of imposture as this would have been, than to imagine he should begin executing a plot, the very existence of which necessarily depended upon *Elizabeth's* being *actually* with child, at a time when he had every reason, the nature of the case would admit of, to conclude, that She *never* would have children. To believe him all on the sudden forging a divine revelation, and feigning himself dumb, with an express prediction, that he should continue speechless till his wife should bring forth a son; and all this with no other view, than to set up *this future son* for the Messiah's Forerunner, notwithstanding *Elizabeth* had hitherto continued *barren*, and he himself must have believed, at the very time, that she would *always* continue so; is *such* a supposition, as the more we consider it, the more absurd and ridiculous it must appear.

YET, impossible as this evidently is, we must believe every particular of it to have been true, before we are at liberty even to suppose, that *Zacharias's* interview with the *Angel* might be a fic-

tion, and his apparent loss of speech a deceit. For it has just been observed, that this remarkable transaction came to pass even some time *before* *Zacharias* could have the least expectation of a child.

FROM the very nature of the thing itself, therefore, it appears absolutely impossible for *Zacharias* to have forged the angel's appearance, and have feigned himself dumb, at that time when it is certain he apparently became so, in order to facilitate any preconceived imposture relating to his son. It is likewise apparent, that the whole of this transaction related *entirely* to the future birth and character of his son, and consequently could not be forged on any other account. From whence it inevitably follows, that *Zacharias* must *really* have conversed with an *Angel*, and have been actually *deprived* of his speech, in the manner related by the evangelist, because the time when it happened proves sufficiently, that there could be no deceit in the case.

BUT, notwithstanding, for the present let us imagine him *already* apprized of *Elizabeth's* unexpected, though doubtful situation, and determined at all events to prosecute this long premeditated imposture. Still it will be utterly incredible, that he should venture to risk any steps of a public nature; and especially one so remarkable as this before

fore us, at the very earliest period, *till the birth of the child was safely over.*

ELIZABETH was already at an age when she could no longer be expected to be the mother of children. And *Zacharias*, if he was the cunning impostor supposed, must have governed himself with regard to the uncertain event of her unexpected situation, by the common rules of probability in cases of the same kind. The point he had to consider was nothing more than a plain matter of fact, of daily observation; and *Zacharias* had all the experience of an advanced age to direct his judgment about it. Can it then be conceived, that he could immediately enter upon the execution of his proposed imposture; as if it was an absolute certain point, that the hero of this intended plot, must shortly after be brought *alive* into the world, merely because *Elizabeth* was now, in her old age, and, *contrary to all expectation*, with child?

It is notorious he must have known this to be, at best, but an *uncertain* event, even when all favourable circumstances concurred; and in the present case, on account of *Elizabeth's advanced age*, more particularly doubtful than in common. So that, had he been already assured of the *first necessary* point, with regard to *Elizabeth's* state and situation; which, however, we have seen he was not; it was impossible for him to be guilty of such ex-

trame madness and folly as to proceed at once to the forgery of a divine revelation, and to punish himself with this pretended loss of speech, for a long and *fixed* period of time, purely to introduce an imposture, relating solely to a child, who was not only yet *unborn*, but whose *birth*, on some peculiar accounts, was an event of *more than ordinary* hazard and uncertainty.

FARTHER, what must we think of this extravagant supposition, when we recollect, that the divine *character*, which, according to the angel's prediction, the future child of *Elizabeth* was to appear in, necessarily determined of *which sex* it must be?

CERTAIN it is, the *Forerunner* of the Messiah was always expressly prophesied of as a *man*. "Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse*." And agreeably to this, the *Angel* assures *Zacharias*, in that revelation, which, if it was forged, he himself must have planned; "thy wife *Elizabeth* shall bear thee" (not a *child*, but) "a *son*, and thou shalt call his name *John*."

* Mal. ch. iv. 5, 6.

SUPPOSE then, that at the time of this vision, when Zacharias became apparently dumb, *Elizabeth's* pregnancy had been clearly ascertained; and that *Zacharias* was determined to begin his part in the plot, notwithstanding the greatest uncertainty of the *birth* of the child, upon which the whole must depend. After all, the existence of the plot supposed will remain still as incredible as before. Because no one can be conceived so absurd, as to forge a prediction under the pretence of its being *divine*, which absolutely pronounced, that a particular child yet *unborn*, and even but very lately conceived, should infallibly prove *a son*. Above all, he who was cunning enough to introduce an imposture, with so refined an artifice as the pretended miraculous loss of speech, can never be believed to have adopted so apparently foolish a design. A design, which unavoidably required the certain foreknowledge of an event, that it was absolutely impossible for him to foreknow; and the contrary of which it was equally probable might take place.

SHOULD we, contrary to all reason, suppose that Zacharias might be capable of so wicked an attempt, it can never be imagined he could contrive one so exceedingly simple, which nothing less than a mere idiot, or an absolute madman, could undertake or conceive. It must not be forgot, that the
very

very supposition of *any* deceit in this case, necessarily implies, as has been already shewn, that *Zacharias* must have been one of the most subtil impostors the world ever produced. Till *such* a one therefore can be supposed to contrive a deceit of the most dangerous nature, in the direct way to betray it; *Zacharias* can never be believed to have foretold, under the mask of *divine* revelation, that his child, yet *unborn*, would certainly prove a *Son*.

BUT these are not all the absurdities which the nature of *Zacharias's* supposed imposture must unavoidably have been attended with. Could we even grant this most ridiculous concession, that *Zacharias* might *unaccountably* resolve upon this pretended prediction, though he *knew* at the same time, that the accomplishment of the event foretold, was in the highest degree uncertain; still it will be found impossible to believe, he could be so extremely foolish, as to pretend to prophesy publicly, as he did*, but *a very few days* after *John's* birth, that his then *infant son* was to be the *Forerunner* of the long-expected *Messiah*.

To be thoroughly satisfied of this, we need only recollect, what the nature of this character was; and *how long* it must be before *John* could enter

* Luke i. 67, to the end.

upon

upon it. As a very remarkable prophet, who was to preach the baptism of repentance, to reclaim the people from their sins, and make known the acceptable year of the Lord; *Zacharias* well knew it would be impossible for his son, to enter upon his task, till he was *between twenty and thirty years of age**. So that the publishing, at the time he did, a pretended divine revelation, foretelling that his son was to be the Messiah's *Forerunner*, was, in fact, no less than affirming it to have been revealed to him from above, that an *infant*, who was then *only eight days old*, would infallibly live, at least, till he was *above twenty years of age*.

BUT among all the deceivers that the world has ever produced, where shall we find one so extravagantly foolish, so bent upon procuring his own destruction, as voluntarily to have staked the success of all his designs, and with his credit, even his *life itself*, upon his being able to ascertain the life of a mere *infant*, for the long term of *twenty years*? To forge a revelation, foretelling the certain continuance of the life of *any* person whatever, for no less than full *twenty years* to come, did even every possible circumstance of age, health, and situation, conspire to render the continuance of it, for such a period, as probable as human na-

* See p. 81—83.

ture could permit, would be too glaring an absurdity for any one *in his senses* to be capable of committing.

WHEREAS in the present case, so far was *Zacharias* from having even any such *probabilities* to ground this supposed forgery upon, that, on the contrary, he could not but know, that the continuance of *John's* life, at the time when he uttered this prediction, was not only a matter of the utmost uncertainty, from the general nature of the thing, but likewise on a *peculiar* account, more than usually improbable. *Zacharias* could not have lived to old age, without being well apprized, how very large a proportion of those who are born into the world, die even in infancy itself; how many more never pass the bounds of childhood; and what great numbers of the remainder still fall off, about the first years of maturity; and, in short, that from infancy till towards the age of *thirty years*, that very interval which he must have undertaken to pronounce for, is, of all others, except old age, the most uncertain and dangerous period of human life. This he could not but know was undoubtedly the case, with mankind in general; and he had besides a *peculiar* reason to believe it would prove so with *his own son* in particular.

IF there was nothing miraculous in the case, *John* was the unexpected, and almost unnatural child of his *old age*; brought into life when *Both* his parents had already outlived the strength of their constitutions, and began to feel sensible approaches of decay. From whence it was more particularly probable, in the natural course of things, that he might very soon give manifest tokens of a weak constitution, and shortly after decline. And can any thing be more exceedingly *ridiculous*, than it would be to imagine, that a crafty veteran deceiver, should plan a laboured scheme of imposture, absolutely requiring him to pretend to prophesy, that *such* a particular infant, *but a few days old*, should certainly live to *above twenty years of age*? If this is not *absolutely* incredible, it will be no easy task to assign any thing that can be so. Yet must the possibility of all this be entirely acquiesced in, before we are even at liberty but to suppose, that *Zacharias* could be a deceiver, and his loss of speech a pretence.

BUT besides the great uncertainty, and even improbability of *John's* living to the age, which *Zacharias's prediction* required, there was another difficulty in the plot, impossible to be removed, and which *alone* would have been sufficient to deter any man, in his senses, from adopting such a design.

It is notorious, that the tempers, abilities, and dispositions, of different men, are so various and opposite, that nothing less than a knowledge far superior to all *human* foresight, could possibly form even the remotest guess, of what would prove the *future character* of an infant, *only eight days old*, when he should be advanced to the full age of a *man*. And he must have arrived at a degree of folly, not easily to be conceived possible, who should dare to foretell this, when conscious of his utter ignorance about it; and by pretending to speak from divine authority, purposely contrive to lay open his own deceptions to almost certain detection. Yet if *Zacharias* was the counterfeit supposed, such must have been the strange conduct he pursued.

ON the day of *John's* circumcision, no sooner did *Zacharias's* speech appear to be restored, than he peremptorily pronounced this prophetic declaration. "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord, to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins*." Nay, the *Angel*, even when he foretold *John's* *conception* and *birth*, is represented as describing his fu-

* Luke i. 76, 77.

ture character and employment, with still greater exactness. "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias; to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Thus did *Zacharias* very minutely describe a most singular character, and pronounce, as by divine authority, that it was the *very* character which *his son* would afterwards appear in; not only when it was yet *but a few days* since his birth, but even shortly before the time of his *conception*. He foretold, that even from his childhood he would be remarkable for his singular good understanding, great abstemiousness, and irreproachable conduct; that he would preach to the whole people the necessity of repentance and reformation, with all the boldness and freedom of the old prophets; and that by the force of his own virtuous example, together with the goodness and energy of his doctrine, he would bring great numbers to a true sense of religion and their duty.

THIS

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THIS, it must be confessed, was no *common* character, but one which required the joint possession of many *rare* endowments to fulfill. To support it, he must be possessed of great quickness of understanding, and a judgement improved by an extensive knowledge of mankind. He must have wisdom to extricate himself from the embarrassments, and fortitude to encounter all the dangers, to which such an attempt would unavoidably expose him. In short, he must be expert in inculcating the necessity of a good life upon others; and so able a hypocrite, as to appear in all respects to practise it himself; and yet, at the same time, so thoroughly wicked at heart, as to undergo all this drudgery in order to deceive the world by a most profligate and mischievous imposture.

BUT how can we believe it possible for Zacharias to have deliberately contrived such a plot, as laid him under the necessity of foretelling, that a particular infant *but just born* into the world, *nay*, one *not yet born*, would certainly become a man of such uncommon abilities, and so depraved a disposition as this? Could he take pleasure in *risking* his credit, and even his life, on the accomplishment of such events, as were not only impossible to be foreknown, but in the highest degree improbable to happen? Yet this must have been *Zacharias's* deliberate and settled choice; if in the
case

case under consideration he was guilty of any desert at all. For should *John* have turned out, as it was most probable he would, a person of only common abilities, it would have been far beyond his power to support *that* character, which his father had prophesied he would maintain. And unless he should be brought likewise to a very uncommon pitch of the most daring wickedness, it was very plain he could never be induced to undertake it.

AND here a still farther difficulty starts up before us. How was it possible for Zacharias to depend upon the certainty of so evidently precarious an event, as his son's becoming *wicked enough* to engage in the prosecution of so impious a design, even should he prove *able* to carry it on? We must indeed allow, that if he designed *John* to carry on this imposture, he must certainly have proposed likewise to educate him in such vicious principles, as would fit him for the undertaking. This the nature of the thing itself requires. But then, this necessary supposition, will be so far from removing the difficulty just mentioned, that it renders it insurmountable, and the whole design, if possible, even more incredible than before.

CAN it be believed, that when *Zacharias* was already within the confines of *old age*, he could

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deliberately

deliberately enter upon such a plot, as plainly required, that he himself should live at least *twenty years* longer, in the vigorous enjoyment of all his present abilities and cunning? Yet ~~this~~ he must have done, if he set on foot the plot supposed. For it necessarily required, that he should live to *educate* his infant son, in such principles of vice and irreligion, as would prepare him for undertaking the plot he himself had begun; and to instill into him, so much artifice and hypocrisy, as would enable him to carry it on; and, lastly, to convince him of such advantages to be drawn from it, as would make him enamoured of the design.

IN the natural course of things, *Zacharias's* only rule of judging in this whole matter, it was a point of the greatest uncertainty, whether he himself might live to see *John* arrive at *half* the age of manhood. And should he survive that, and even a much later period, he had nothing to expect, but that his present activity would long have left him, and his former cunning and abilities have been so far destroyed, as utterly to disable him from *training up* this intended impostor. And should this prove the case, as *Zacharias* must have expected it would, what must at length have ensued from all his deep-laid designs, and the predictions he had so foolishly published, at the
time

time of *John's* conception and birth? *John* could never have undertaken to personate that character which *Zacharias* had foretold, as by divine authority, that he would infallibly appear in; and *Zacharias's* long-concealed iniquity must at last have been detected, and punished with, at least, its due infamy and reproach.

JOHN might indeed have become abandoned enough for any undertaking, by being suffered to grow up in the unrestrained indulgence of all his appetites, and the total neglect of all rational instruction. And in this manner he might have arrived at manhood, while *Zacharias* experienced the usual infirmities of extreme old age, and was in all respects unable to corrupt him. But then this would have been quite insufficient for the execution of *Zacharias's* design; nay, it would necessarily have prevented *John* from ever attempting to pursue it.

INSUFFICIENT it must have been, because a most extraordinary character was already particularly marked out for him to support; and in which therefore it was absolutely necessary, that he should be completely instructed, and besides, prevailed with to assume it. That it must have disabled him from ever acting his intended part, is equally plain; because the support of it required the exertion of all those abilities, which a total

neglect of his education, and his unrestrained indulgence in every vicious inclination, must inevitably have destroyed. And what motives could prevail with One, who from his very infancy had grown up without all restraint, to assume and persist in a character of most extraordinary abstemiousness, severity, and virtue?

UNLESS therefore we can believe, that at the time of *John's* birth, *Zacharias* was ignorant, even of the common period of human life, and the usual decays attendant upon great age, and firmly persuaded of the continuance of his own life; nor of that *only*, but of all his active faculties, to a most uncommon and improbable length of years; unless we can believe all this, it must be clearly incredible that he should, about the time of *John's* conception or birth, forge such a revelation concerning the future character of his son, as made it necessary for *him himself* to live to train him up in vice and hypocrisy, for full *twenty years* to come.

BUT, in addition to all the particulars already mentioned, how must the impossibility of this whole contrivance increase upon us, when it is considered, that, in reality, *Zacharias himself* could *not* believe, that *John* would ever have an *opportunity* to prosecute his supposed design, even if he himself should live long enough to train him up
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completely for it; and moreover, must have apprehended, that the worst punishment would overtake him himself, should he live so long. Yet this is nothing more than a true state of the case.

ABOUT the time of the birth of *John*, the whole Jewish nation was firmly persuaded, that the *true Messiah* himself, and much more his *Forerunner*, would very speedily appear. This is fully evident from the gospel-history in general; but more especially from the remarkable conduct of Herod, in consequence of the appearance of the wise men at Jerusalem; and the cruel massacre of the children, which he thought it necessary to proceed to, immediately after their departure. A cruelty which he could never have resolved on, had he not known, that the expectations of the people were so universal and eager, as to think they endangered the safety of his throne.

At such a time as this, when the arrival of the *true Messiah* himself was looked on as an event that might every day come to pass, and could not be far off, how could *Zacharias* imagine *John* would have any *opportunity* to counterfeit the character of the *Forerunner*; when it was plain that *John* could not appear upon the stage, till full *twenty years* afterwards? *Zacharias* could expect nothing else, than that the *true harbinger* of the

Messiah would have appeared in the mean time, and have proved his divine commission, long before *John* would have been old enough to set himself up in his stead. And then *Zacharias* had good reason to think, that if he himself should be still alive; which, as this might happen very soon, might very probably be the case; his own forgeries of divine revelations, and the pretended loss and recovery of his speech, would immediately be called to mind; and that he should meet with that infamy and punishment, which crimes of this particular nature, and among the Jews above all others, could not but incur. So that whether he himself lived or died, and whatever viciousness and cunning he might be able to instil into his son; He could not but think it extremely improbable, that *John* should ever have an opportunity to carry on the supposed imposture; and consequently, it is utterly incredible, that he could proceed to such dangerous and shocking forgeries, merely to lay a foundation for it, if he should.

WHEN we lay together these most remarkable particulars, all necessarily included in the very nature of the supposed imposture itself, its absurdities must appear at once *so many*, and *so manifest*, as to shew it plainly impossible for any one but a downright idiot, or an absolute madman, to have eq-

engaged in it; at the same time that it is equally impossible even for these to have contrived it. And to suppose still, that *such* a plot could be the deliberate design of an old, subtil, and successful impostor, such as *Zacharias*, if any at all, must have been; would be judging in direct opposition to the plainest dictates of common sense, and in reality believing what is, humanly speaking, impossible.

AND here, to conclude this part of the argument, it is necessary to observe, that every conclusion we have now drawn from the *nature* of the plot in debate, to prove the impossibility of its existence, as far as relates to *John*, is equally applicable to all the circumstances of the birth of *Jesus* likewise; which, we have seen long ago, must have been the counterpart of the same design. *His* future *birth* was openly predicted by his parents themselves soon after his conception; his *life* was *positively assured* for the *same term of years*; his whole *employment* and *public character*, were *defined* even more exactly than that of *John*; though they were of such a nature, that no *human* accomplishments whatever could possibly fulfil them; and *Joseph* and *Mary* themselves must have thought, at the very time, that in all probability *Jesus* would never have an *opportunity* to assume them.

THOUGH therefore the whole imposture, as it relates to *Jesus* as well as *John*, is rendered utterly incredible, by considering its numerous absurdities, as far as they concern *John only*; the impossibility of the plot becomes, as it were, doubly evident, when we add the consideration of the several circumstances of the birth of *Jesus* to that of *John*, and survey the whole connected transaction in one view,

SECTION II.

Some particular facts previous to the births of John and Jesus, considered.

THUS far have we been proving the impossibility of the imposture under consideration, merely by examining its own internal *nature* and constitution. But the point in debate will still admit of no small additional illustration, from considering some particulars that occur, in several distinct steps of these complicated transactions. For if the *whole* was an imposture, all the parts must have been so many distinct steps, deliberately agreed on by those who devised and carried it on. Whereas several of *these*, when closely attended to, will be found such as the contrivers of the *whole* design could not be capable of adopting.*

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* To prevent an objection, which might otherwise arise, it is here proper to apprise the reader, that in the remainder of this part, as well as in the last, the arguments are frequently drawn from various particulars related by the evangelists, without giving *immediate* proofs, that the particulars themselves must certainly have come to pass as they are related. This may possibly appear at first, like relying upon the authority of the *Evangelists* for their truth. But when we recollect,

NEGLECTING then for the present what has been so fully proved to the contrary, from the internal *nature* of the whole design ; let us suppose it *not* impossible for *Zacharias*, *Elizabeth*, *Mary*, and *Joseph*, to have forged some such revelations as they actually pretended to have had made to them ; and at the very time too, when they declared them to have happened. Are there not still some important particulars occurring in the progress of the plot, which they could not have agreed on, had the whole been an imposture of their joint contriving ?

IN the account of *Zacharias's* vision, besides the prediction of the future conception, birth, and divine character of *John* ; we are told of a very signal punishment inflicted upon *Zacharias*, by the Angel, for presuming to doubt the accomplishment of his predictions. That he was instantaneously struck *dumb*, for a *fixed period* of about *nine months*, at the expiration of which time he was as instantaneously restored to speech.

recollect, that it has been already proved, both from the circumstances of every person concerned, and from the internal nature of the thing, that there could *not* be any imposture in the case ; for the sake of which only, any of those particulars, which may hereafter be made use of, could be forged ; this seeming objection falls immediately to the ground.

HERE

HERE it is obvious, that if the Angel's appearance was nothing more than a fiction, *Zacharias's* loss of speech and recovery of it, could be no better than a downright deceit. And this he must have put in practice merely to gain credit to the pretended vision itself, by the appearance of an actual miracle in its support*. A masterpiece of cunning it must be confessed, and such as must prove its author to have been very closely attentive to every circumstance of what he was about. But, at the same time, so dangerous and *desperate* an expedient, that however desirous he might be to contrive some artifice or other for this end, it is impossible to believe he could venture upon *This*.

For what must this have been, but devoting himself to an *absolute* and *uninterrupted Silence*, while he was in full enjoyment of the powers of speech, for a continued series of no less than *nine months*? A restraint, than which, it is plain, none could be more *painful* in itself; none more *inconvenient* to the prosecution of his designs; none more likely to be the means of *betraying* them.

* We must not forget, that the truth of the *external fact*, i. e. *Zacharias's* having publicly *appeared* dumb, in the manner Luke has related, has been fully proved already, p. 156 —164.

THE mere painfulness of such a restraint, for so long a continuance, was alone sufficient to have deterred any one from voluntarily laying himself under an obligation of so very irksome a nature. And had it not been so, such a resolution would have interfered so directly, with the prosecution of the plot; that on this account alone he could never have adopted it. He was now only laying the foundation of a long and intricate imposture, in which *Joseph* and *Mary* were intimately concerned with him, and had *their* part likewise soon afterwards to act. Nothing could be more desirable, and even necessary, in so dangerous and even difficult an undertaking, than securing each other's courage and fidelity, by conferring together, as often as might be, upon the plot they had agreed on, and the dangers they were to guard against. Whereas the *strange* expedient before us must either have effectually prohibited all intercourse of this kind between them; or continually have exposed *Zacharias*, and with him the whole *confederacy*, to imminent danger of detection.

ABOVE all, can it be thought credible, that *Zacharias* could be so confident of his own perpetual watchfulness and care, as to believe, that a bare resolution to *appear* speechless, would enable him to continue *absolutely dumb*, for so considerable

siderable a length of time? That upon no occasion whatever, during so long an interval, he should be so far off his guard, as to utter a *single* inadvertent word, and betray the cheat? Or is it credible, that *Zacharias*, in particular, with all his long experience and peculiar caution, should choose to risk the detection of his iniquity upon such a manifest hazard as this? Scarce any supposition can be more ridiculous and incredible. Could he not have hit upon some other expedient to answer the same end; certainly he would much rather have left his interview with the Angel, to be received upon his own long-established credit, and authority only, than have attempted supporting it by such a contrivance, as he himself must have thought, at the very time, was almost sure to *betray* it*.

* The argument here is purposely confined to the supposition, that Zacharias was *only*, to all appearance, *dumb*, because our translation is confined to *this* sense only. But some of the best commentators are strongly of opinion, that he appeared not only *dumb*, but *deaf* likewise. (See Hamm. on Luke i. 62. Lightfoot on Luke i. 22. See also Lamy on Luke i. 22.) And should *this* interpretation be allowed, the absurdities already mentioned on the *first* supposition, will become at once so exceedingly magnified, that one cannot scruple to pronounce, without the least hesitation, that it was *impossible* for any deceiver to run the hazard of such an expedient as *This*.

BUT

BUT the evidence to be drawn from this particular, will be found of still greater weight, by considering, that *very remarkable difference* we find between the *consequence* of the Angel's interview with *Zacharias*, and his appearance to *Mary*.

ZACHARIAS, it is said *, was terrified at this interview, and expressed great doubtfulness of the truth of the Angel's message; and as a punishment for his unbelief, was immediately struck *dumb*, in the manner just now related. *Mary* likewise is represented as having been exceedingly astonished at the angel's appearance, and wonderful declarations to *her*, and plainly signifying her opinion, that it was impossible they should come to pass; but at length, as acquiescing in the expectation of seeing them fulfilled, and as having *escaped* all kind of punishment for first doubting of their truth.

Now if these appearances of the *Angel*, and of course all the circumstances related, were mere fictions of *Zacharias* and his Associates, contrived for a foundation to their subsequent imposture; it seems incredible, that *Zacharias* should have been represented as *struck dumb* in this manner; and yet *Mary*, at the same time, as having *escaped* all *visible* rebuke. It should seem, had there been any deceit in the case, either that *both* of them would

* See Luke i. 12—20.

have appeared in some manner *visibly* punished; or if *One* of them only, that it then must have been *Mary* instead of *Zacharias*.

FROM what has been observed already, it is certain, that if we grant it *possible* for *Zacharias* to have laid himself under this strange and painful necessity, of appearing totally deprived of speech, for so long a time; it could be on no other account than because he thought it absolutely necessary to add the sanction of an apparent miracle, to the relation of so uncommon an event, filled with such extraordinary predictions. It must be owned, that *Zacharias* could not have hazarded this extraordinary expedient, which exposed him to so much danger of betraying the whole, unless he thought it *absolutely necessary*, in order to procure credit to his own relation. But if *Zacharias himself*, with all the advantages of his sacred profession, his advanced age, and long-established reputation, thought *his own testimony* insufficient to gain credit to his relation of such a fact; how was it possible he could imagine, that the angel's appearance to *Mary*, with a prediction even still more wonderful than his own, would be received upon only the *mere* affirmation of *Mary*?

HAD the *facts* themselves been but alike improbable, the credibility of the *witnesses* was very far from being equal. *Zacharias* had good reason

to

to expect, that *his* testimony would have a considerable weight and influence with the people in general. But if he thought his *own* credit, insufficient to warrant an event of this extraordinary nature; what regard could he think would be paid to the mere witness of an *obscure, ignorant girl*, not yet arrived at years of judgement and discretion? What more obvious, than that so improbable a tale, supported only by the evidence of so contemptible, and at the same time so interested a witness, would be turned into ridicule; or, at the best, be regarded as the mere delusions of fear and superstition, so generally attributed to her sex.

BESIDES, with regard to the *facts themselves*; the appearance of an *Angel* in the holy place of the temple, charged with a divine revelation to a *priest* of respectable character, was an event so similar to what, all the Jews knew, had several times happened, since the settlement of their nation, that, on this account alone, they would be more favourably inclined to believe it. Whereas, a still more astonishing revelation, made to a mere *girl*, bred up in obscurity, and destitute of all external causes of respect, it must naturally be expected, would be heard with prejudice, and rejected with contempt. And while no obvious motive whatever could lead them to suspect *Zacharias*

Zacharias, of any such deceit; *Mary's situation*, before her marriage was concluded, would very shortly have furnished so probable a cause for her forging the revelation in question, as was enough to bring her veracity into universal suspicion.

It was not at all opposite to any received opinion of the *Jews*, that the Messiah's *Forerunner* should be the son of a respectable priest; so that thus far *Zacharias's* account was very likely to be well received. But nothing could be more *inconsistent* with all their acknowledged notions concerning the *Messiah himself*, than the supposition, that *He* should be born of one of no higher station, than the intended wife of a *carpenter*. This was such a stumbling block as *Zacharias* had little reason to think they could ever get over, especially when joined to the reason just mentioned for suspecting *Mary's* veracity. How then can it be conceived, that *Zacharias* and his associates should think it absolutely necessary to strengthen *his own testimony*, with the pretence of a miracle; even at so manifest a hazard of his inadvertently betraying the whole imposture; and yet, at the same time, leave the testimony of *Mary* quite unguarded, to stand or fall by its own suspicious credit and authority?

It is manifest, that if they had jointly determined it to be necessary to make use of *any* ap-

parent miracle at all, they would either have contrived one to confirm *Mary's* revelation, as well as *Zacharias's*, or *Mary's* alone; since *That* stood so much more in need of some external support. So that had these revelations been forged, for the *only* purpose for which they could be contrived, we should either have found, that *Mary* pretended to have been struck dumb, instead of *Zacharias*; or that some other, *no less apparent*, miraculous punishment, was as evidently inflicted upon *Her* likewise.

Nor can it be here objected, that impostors are frequently inconsistent with themselves, and often betray their plots by flagrant follies in some particulars, while they guard against detection by the most refined cunning in others. For not to repeat, what it has been so often necessary to mention, that if *Zacharias* was a deceiver, *He* must unquestionably have been the most subtil and cautious impostor the world ever produced, the particular now before us did not allow room for any such inconsistency.

From the very nature of the thing, it seems manifestly impossible, that *He* could take so much thought to secure a good reception for *his own* story, and pay no regard whatever to the success of *Mary's*; by far the more likely to be rejected of the two. For an attention to *both* was not to two
distinct

distinct steps of the plot; one of which might possibly be overlooked, while the other was remembered; but in fact they were *both* necessarily comprehended under one and the same consideration. And even had it been possible for *Zacharias* to have attended to the *one*, and not the *other*; it was *not* possible for *Joseph* and *Mary*, with whom it has been already seen the whole plot must have been concerted, to have been, at the same time, totally forgetful, of what so immediately concerned *their* own safety and success. *Zacharias's* taking this particular care for himself, must at least have reminded *Them* of *their much greater* want of some similar expedient, to procure credit to *their* part of the plot.

To the decisive evidence of these considerations, we may add the corroborating testimony of one fact more, which happened before the birth of *John*, and which seems to afford as strong a proof, as the nature of such circumstances can admit of, that there could be no such plot on foot, as that we have all along been supposing. The particular itself, is the step *Mary* took, immediately after her interview with the angel.

THE angel, after revealing to her what would very shortly happen to herself, proceeded to inform her of what had already happened to *Elizabeth*. "Behold thy cousin. *Elizabeth*, She hath

“also conceived a child, in her old age; and this
“is the sixth month with her, who was called
“barren.” Upon receiving this information, we
find Mary immediately left her own home; “and
“went into the hill-country with haste, into a city
“of Juda, and entered into the house of Zacha-
“rias, and saluted Elizabeth;” and there stayed
with her, no less than three months, till the time of
John’s birth was almost arrived.

HERE we have a fact, which may serve greatly
to illustrate the integrity, and artless innocence of
every person concerned. Had *Zacharias, Eliza-
beth, Mary, and Joseph*, been engaged together,
in concerting so daring and dangerous an impos-
ture as that in question; we cannot but think, that
it would have been one of the first and principal
objects of their attention, to conceal their *corre-
spondence*, at this particular time, as much as pos-
sible from the public view. They could not but
expect, that whenever their intended counterfeits
should appear upon the stage, and become objects
of the public attention, the strictest enquiries would
probably be made into the *families* of two persons,
whose claims to divine characters, were so very
extraordinary in themselves, and so closely con-
nected with each other. For this reason they
would studiously have avoided all appearance of
any *intimate* connection, especially *at this time*;

as

as ~~that~~, in such a case, more than any thing else, might induce every one to suspect some concerted imposture. How then can the fact before us be reconciled with the supposition of the plot in question? What can be more improbable, if they were all engaged in the supposed contrivance, than that *Mary* should go to the house of *Zacharias*, and He permit her to stay in his house, for no less than *three months* together, at this critical time? It is incredible, that the contrivers of so artificial and refined a plot could be guilty of such an oversight as this.

WHEREAS, if we suppose their accounts of the angel's appearances to be true, and the several parties concerned innocent of all sinister designs, the whole difficulty is cleared up at once; and nothing could be more *natural* than this behaviour in consequence of these events. An honest and undesigning heart could not but burn with a desire of communicating to its friend, such an astonishing revelation as *Mary* had received concerning *herself*; as well as of determining the credit it deserved, by enquiring into the truth of what the angel likewise informed her, had *already* happened to her friend. Nor could any conduct be more *natural*, when *Elizabeth* and *She* certainly found themselves made the happy instruments of fulfilling those glorious promises, which had been revealed to their

forefathers, than their passing some time together, in admiring those astonishing events which were already come to pass; and those more astonishing still, which were now upon the point of being fulfilled. And surely, when their conduct approves itself, in every particular, the *natural* result of *innocence*, and is *incompatible* with the supposition of their *guilt*, it would argue no small degree of perverseness, still to suppose them engaged in the prosecution of an imposture.

SECTION III.

Several very remarkable Facts, subsequent to the Births of John and Jesus, considered.

IF the few facts just considered, *preceding* the births of *John* and *Jesus*, bear witness in so strong a manner, to the innocence and veracity of *all* those, who were most immediately concerned in these events; much more will several astonishing particulars, that soon *followed* them, convince us, that they could not possibly be the effects of human artifice and cunning; or arise from the secret machinations of *Zacharias* and *his Associates*; the *only* persons who could possibly have contrived them.

LUKE having particularly informed us of the time and place of *Jesus's* birth, and the means by which it happened, that he was born at *Bethlehem*, immediately goes on with the following narration.

“AND there were in the same country,” near Bethlehem, “shepherds abiding in the field, “keeping watch over their flock by night. And “lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them,
O 4 “and

“ and the glory of the Lord shone round about
“ them, and they were sore afraid. And the
“ angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold,
“ I bring you good tidings of great joy, which
“ shall be to all people. For unto you is born
“ this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which
“ is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign
“ unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in
“ swaddling cloaths, lying in a manger. And sud-
“ denly there was with the angel a multitude of
“ the heavenly host; praising God, and saying,
“ glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace,
“ good will towards men. And it came to pass,
“ as the angels were gone away from them into
“ heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let
“ us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this
“ thing which is come to pass, which the Lord
“ hath made known unto us. And they came
“ with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and
“ the babe lying in a manger. And when they
“ had seen it, they made known abroad the say-
“ ing which was told them concerning this child.
“ And all they that heard it wondered at those
“ things, which were told them by the shepherds.
“ But Mary kept all these things and pondered
“ them in her heart. And the shepherds returned
“ glorifying and praising God, for all the things
“ they

"they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them *."

HERE a new scene opens upon us, crowded with unexpected visions, and divine revelations, bearing witness in the most extraordinary manner to the sacred character and divine mission of *Jesus*. But if the angel's *former* appearances, and predictions of the births of *John* and *Jesus*, which have already been considered, were in reality but *fiction*s of Those to whom they were pretended to have been made; then must *this* astonishing account of what happened to the *Shepherds* of Bethlehem, be an imposture likewise. And if this be so, it must have been brought about in one or other of the following ways.

EITHER the *Shepherds* must have been deluded by the strength of their own superstitious imaginations into a *belief*, that they saw angels which never appeared; and heard the most surprizing things revealed to them; which in fact were never spoken: Or else, they must have been corrupted by *Zacharias*, and his *Confederates*, purposely to give out this revelation, and to pretend to seek for *Joseph* and *Mary* and the *young child*, by night, as if in consequence of it; and they knew, at the same time, that every particular of this relation was entirely

* Luke ii. 8—20.

false.

false. But we shall soon see, that neither of these suppositions can possibly be true.

It is notorious, that nothing could be more inconsistent with the universal expectation of the *Jews*, nor any thing more *contradictory* to all the notions they had formed of the long-expected *Messiah*, their future king and deliverer; than that he should make his entry into the world, in the *hable* of an *inn*. On the contrary, they expected him to appear with such a glorious display of his superior dignity and power, as might seem a fit introduction to that universal dominion they believed he would assume. And it will readily be allowed, that the strength of imagination, however overheated, could not feign to itself divine appearances and revelations, diametrically *opposite* to all its strongest prejudices and conceits.

HAD the force of enthusiasm therefore painted this chorus of angels, and dictated the glad tidings they brought, the *Angels* could not have informed the shepherds, that a particular most astonishing event had actually taken place, which could never have entered into *their* thoughts; and which, above all others, *they* firmly believed it *impossible* should ever come to pass. And indeed had it not been impossible on this account alone, what could be more difficult to believe, than that *several* poor shepherds, thus accidentally met together,

gether, should *all* be seized at once with such a strong enthusiastic delusion; *all* be possessed at once with the *same* wild imagination; *all* see the *same* angels, and hear the *same* revelation, and song of rejoicing; and all this relating solely to a matter so extremely *foreign* from their common thoughts and occupation, as the time, place, and minutest circumstances of the birth of the *Messiah*?

Nor to insist further therefore on the manifest incredibility of such a supposition; if there was any deceit in the case, it must needs have been in the *Shepherds themselves*. They must have been seduced to assist in the grand plot, and on this occasion only acted a part they had been before instructed to perform. Let us see then, whether this supposition is, at bottom, at all more credible than the former.

ON this occasion we might appeal to the uniform practice of *all* impostors, who, with good reason, are so fearful of nothing, as of imparting their designs to *more* persons, than are absolutely *necessary* for the prosecution of their plots. We might appeal to the conduct of that arch impostor, Mahomet himself, who, though he was practising upon a people ignorant even to barbarism, and liable to all the extravagances of the most foolish credulity, did not dare to seek assistance in his plot from more than

one

one or two persons at the most; and concealed his connection even with them, with so much care and circumspection, that it has cost even the most learned no little pains to find them out*. Every argument likewise, that has been already† drawn from the peculiar danger of the case in the plot before us, to shew the incredibility of *Zacharias's* attempting to make *any* associates at all in the plot supposed, might here be applied, with double force, to the supposition of his having made known his iniquity to the *Shepherds* in question.

WHAT more incredible, than that he should almost *provoke* some one to betray him, by laying himself open to *so many*, merely for the sake of executing a contrivance, by no means necessary for the success of his grand design? Or how was it possible for him to choose to corrupt *those*, above others, whose simplicity and great ignorance of mankind, made them, of all orders of men, the most *unfit* to promote his schemes; and the most likely to be shocked at, and *betray* his proposals? It would be difficult to invent a supposition much more inconceivable than this; that *Zacharias* or *Joseph* could attempt to corrupt a number of *Shep-*

* See Prideaux's Life of Mahomet, p. 36—49. 8vo.—2d. Edition.

† See Part I. Sect. 4.

herds,

heads, to bear the witness *these* did to the divine character of *Jesus*; or that *They* should have become the zealous promoters of *such* an imposture, and ever after have remained the faithful concealers of it, if he had.

BUT still new wonders rise up before us. Though we have already discovered *so many* persons, who must certainly have been made partakers with *Zacharias* and *Mary*, in whatever imposture they were now carrying on, more actors are still coming upon the stage, to perform new parts in the plot.

“AND when the days of her, *Mary's*, purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished,” that is, about a month after *Jesus's* birth, “they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every male that openeth the womb, shall be called holy to the Lord. And to offer a sacrifice, according to that which is said in the law of the Lord; a pair of turtle doves, or two young pidgeons. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed, unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death,
“before

“ before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he
“ came by the spirit into the temple: And when
“ the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do
“ for him after the custom of the law, then took
“ he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and
“ said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart
“ in peace, according to thy word. For mine
“ eyes have seen thy salvation; which thou hast
“ prepared before the face of all people: a light to
“ lighten the gentiles, and the glory of thy people
“ Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled
“ at those things which were spoken of him. And
“ Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his
“ mother, Behold this child is set for the fall,
“ and rising again, of many in Israel; and for a
“ sign, which shall be spoken against; yea a
“ sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,
“ that the thoughts of many hearts may be re-
“ vealed.

“ AND there was one Anna, a prophetess, the
“ daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser; she
“ was of a great age, and had lived with an hus-
“ band seven years from her virginity; and she was
“ a widow of about fourscore and four years;
“ which departed not from the temple, but served
“ God with fastings and prayers night and day.
“ And she coming in that instant, gave thanks
“ likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all
“ them

“ them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.
 “ And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into
 “ Galilee; to their own city, Nazareth.”

STRANGE as this supposition will at once appear, it must be owned; that if the circumstances recorded of the births of *John* and *Jesus*, were only so many parts of a deep-laid imposture; the remarkable particulars just related must have been a subtil contrivance from one end to the other.

SIMEON and *Anna*, of whom so honourable mention is made for their acknowledged piety and goodness, must at the bottom have been two most impious deceivers, who had been corrupted by *Zacharias*, or some of his associates, to abett his imposture in the manner just related. Their coming into the temple at this particular time, as it is said, by the Spirit; *Simeon's* taking *Jesus* in his arms; his most remarkable address of thanksgiving to God, for the arrival of the *Messiah*; and his prophetic assurances to *Mary* concerning her son; together with *Anna's* public thanks, and inspired declarations, positively asserting the divine character of *Jesus*; must all have been the result of mere artifice and contrivance; and measures first privately concerted between them. Nay, what is still more, all the claims of *Simeon* and *Anna* to
 divine

dixine inspiration, *before* this time, and especially *Simeon's* revelation, "that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ;" must all have been mere forgery and pretence, from the very first; and, purposely given out, with the view of transacting this particular scene of the plot. So that, though the part, which we must now believe, *They* had undertaken to execute, did not bring them into public view before; *They* must in reality have been privy to the whole imposture, and have agreed to act the part they did to support it, some time before they came upon the stage.

BUT how will it be possible to solve such a series of difficulties as here thrust themselves into view? Can we suppose *Zacharias* resolutely bent upon pursuing the most certain means to betray his own iniquity, and procure his destruction? Could the wickedest and most subtil impostor that ever lived, single out those of the most approved piety and goodness, to make associates in his crimes; and choose to lay open his impious devices, above all others, to the wise and good? Could he suppose, that they, who from youth to old age had persevered in the practice of piety and religion, would at last, on the sudden, become equally industrious in the service of impiety and vice? Could he expect to conquer the virtue of four-

score

score years, and even without the least prospect of reward? Or could the same persons, who had approved themselves sincere worshippers of the God of Israel, through the most dangerous stages of human life, at length proceed to mock him with horrid blasphemies, in his very temple itself; when they could have no inducement for doing it, at the extremity of *old age*?

IF all this be allowed impossible; and the nature of the thing will not even admit of a doubt; then is it absolutely incredible, that *Zacharias* or *Joseph* could have attempted to corrupt *Simeon* and *Anna*, and equally so that *They* could have agreed to abett such an imposture, if either of them had. And since *their* conduct was so very remarkable, though on this single occasion only, as to prove beyond doubt, that *They* must have been principals in the plot supposed, if in fact it had any real existence; the integrity of *Zacharias*, and every person concerned, appears incontestibly proved, and all the miraculous circumstances related of the births *both* of *John* and of *Jesus*, must be acknowledged as unquestionably true*.

BUT

* In addition to what has been here urged, drawn from the peculiar *characters* and *circumstances* of *Simeon* and *Anna* themselves, it is likewise proper to observe, that every argument which has been already alleged, in Part I. Sect. 4.

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drawn

BUT the amazing artifices of *Zacharias* and his associates to conceal their imposture, if in truth they

drawn from the nature of the supposed contrivance alone, to prove the utter incredibility of *Zacharias's* communicating such a plot to any one at all; must here be allowed their full weight and influence in regard to *Simeon* and *Anna*, and clearly prove it to have been impossible for him to have made confederates of them.

But besides, the very supposition, that they had applied to *Simeon* and *Anna*, and engaged them to assist in their scheme, is in fact immediately and essentially destructive of their joint plot itself. For, if so, it must either have been *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* on one side, or *Joseph* and *Mary* on the other, who looked upon *Simeon* and *Anna* as fit persons for their purpose, and, in consequence of this opinion, applied to them to assist the cause. But had *Zacharias* had any knowledge of *Simeon* and *Anna*, and looked upon them in this light; certainly he would at first have applied to *Them alone*, to assist him in some such manner in favour of *John*, as they acted with regard to *Jesus*; and with their assistance he could have carried on his own plan concerning *John only*; nor should we have found him connected, in any of his transactions, with *Joseph* and *Mary*; or his contrivance for *John*, burthened with one of so much more hazardous a nature, as that relating to *Jesus*. While, on the other hand, had *Joseph* and *Mary* been the persons who knew the real characters of *Simeon* and *Anna*, and engaged them to act the part they did, relating to *Jesus*; they could have had no reason whatever for laying open their designs to *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*; who, being old and childless, were evidently incapable of carrying on the other part of their imposture. So that, take which side we please,

they had any to conceal; or, to speak more properly, the indisputable evidences of their innocence and integrity, are not yet at an end. There still remains to be considered another, and a most remarkable transaction, which will afford, perhaps, as decisive evidence, to determine the point in debate, as any that has been hitherto taken notice of. It is related by Matthew * as follows :

“ Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem
 “ of Judea, in the days of Herod the king;
 “ behold there came Wise Men from the East to
 “ Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born
 “ king of the Jews? For we have seen his star
 “ in the East, and are come to worship him.
 “ When Herod the king heard these things, he
 “ was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
 “ And when he had gathered all the chief priests,
 “ and scribes of the people together, he de-
 “ manded of them, where Christ should be born?
 “ And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judea :
 “ for thus it is written by the prophet : And
 “ thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not
 “ the least among the princes of Juda ; for out
 “ of thee shall come a governor that shall rule

please, the supposition of either party's persuading *Simeon* and *Anna* to engage in their plot, is, at the bottom, absolutely destructive of the supposition of their *joint* imposture itself.

* Matt. ii. 1—16.

“ my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had
“ privily called the Wise Men, enquired of them
“ diligently, what time the star appeared. And
“ he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go, and
“ search diligently for the young child, and when
“ ye have found him, bring me word again, that I
“ may come and worship him also. When they
“ had heard the king, they departed; and lo,
“ the star, which they saw in the East, went before
“ them, till it came and stood over where the
“ young child was. When they saw the star, they
“ rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when
“ they were come into the house, they saw the
“ young child, with Mary his mother, and fell
“ down and worshipped him: and when they had
“ opened their treasures, they presented him with
“ gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And
“ being warned of God in a dream, that they
“ should not return to Herod, they departed into
“ their own country another way. And when
“ they were departed, behold, the angel of the
“ Lord appeareth unto Joseph in a dream, say-
“ ing; Arise, and take the young child, and his
“ mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou
“ there until I bring thee word; for Herod will
“ seek the young child to destroy him. When
“ he rose, he took the young child, and his mo-
“ ther, by night, and departed into Egypt; and
“ was

“ was there until the death of Herod ; that it
 “ might be fulfilled, which was spoken of the
 “ Lord, by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt
 “ have I called my son. Then Herod, when he
 “ saw that he was mocked of the Wise Men,
 “ was exceeding wroth ; and sent forth, and slew
 “ all the children that were in Bethlehem, and
 “ in all the coasts thereof, from two years old
 “ and under ; according to the time which he had
 “ diligently enquired of the Wise Men.”

The evangelist makes no mention of the precise time when this remarkable event came to pass, nor is it material to the subject in hand. But, as far as may be collected from some circumstances, it seems at least very probable, that it happened about a *twelvemonth** after *Jesus's birth*. Various have been the opinions proposed concerning the particular character and country of these unexpected persons, who, we are only told, were *Wise Men from the East*†. But, to pass over this disquisition,

* See the notes on the 11th sect. of Macknight's Paraphrase on his Harmony of the Gospels.—Hammond's Observation on Luke ii. 24.—See Lightfoot, Vol. I, 205.

† See the commentators on the place, and note 1 on the 11th sect. of Macknight's Harmony. Lightfoot, Vol. I, 436. &c.

it will be sufficient to our purpose to observe, that if the other miraculous circumstances related of the births of *Zacharias's* and *Mary's* sons, were only the several parts of a plot, for deceiving the Jews with a *false* prophet, and a *counterfeit* Messiah; then must these *Wise Men from the East* have been mere impostors, and nothing better than accomplices with *Zacharias*; sent by him to *Jerusalem*, purposely to act that particular character, they there appeared in.

THIS extraordinary device too must have been put in execution, in order by their astonishing enquiry, even of *Herod* himself, after a young *King* of the Jews, lately born in his own dominions; as well as by the religious worship they were to pay the child when they found him; to fix the thoughts and expectations of the whole people upon *Jesus*; that when he should afterwards be old enough to begin acting his own part, they might the more readily receive him for the promised *Messiah*. The story of their being apprized of the *young king's birth*, by the appearance of a star in the East, and its appearing again to them, and directing them to the house where *Jesus* lay; must all have been forged, merely to support their characters, and carry on the delusion. Their being likewise warned of God, in a dream,

dream, to depart from *Bethlehem* without ~~turning~~ to *Herod*; and *Joseph's* carrying *Mary* and the *child* into *Egypt*, immediately after, in consequence of a similar divine command; must have been forgeries given out to throw an air of mystery over their sudden departure; while, in fact, *every one* of these steps must have been concerted between them *All*, long before these pretended *Wise Men from the East* made their appearance at *Jerusalem*.

At length then we are arrived at the finishing stroke of this marvellous combination; which, at first sight, might force one to acknowledge it, for ingenuity of design, not unworthy of the completest masters in deceit. But a closer inspection will presently convince us, that the supposition of this ingenious expedient is on many accounts incredible, and *such as cannot* be received.

In particular, the *nature* of the thing itself will fully prove, that if *Zacharias*, and those connected with him, were actually engaged in the grand plot we have all along supposed, still it will remain incredible, that they could attempt the expedient before us. But, above all, the whole Jewish *Sanhedrim*, and even *Herod himself*, will bear ample witness, that the *Wise Men* in question were, beyond all doubt, the real persons they pretended to be.

THAT some such persons as the evangelist has described, appeared publicly at *Jerusalem*, enquiring for the *young King of the Jews*; that *Herod*, in consequence of an application to him on this account, summoned a great council of all the chief priests and scribes, to determine upon the place where *Christ* should be born; that, in consequence of their determination, he sent the strangers to *Bethlehem*; commanding them, when they had found the *young king*, to acquaint him also, where he was; that they there found *Mary*, and her son *Jesus*, and paid homage to him, acknowledging him to be the *young king* they had sought after; and that, because they departed without returning to *Herod*, as he desired, he immediately put to death all the children about *Jesus's* age, which were to be found in *Bethlehem*, and the region round about; all these facts, related clearly, positively asserted, and never in any part contradicted, are not now to be called in question.

HAD they *not* been true, the evangelist could not have *dared* to assert them; and even if he could have been guilty of so much folly, their falsehood would have been soon detected, and publicly laid open, and the credit of his gospel have been effectually destroyed. The facts are of so astonishing, and so public a nature, that
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this must inevitably have been the case. Not to say, that the very supposition of *any* deceit at the bottom, necessarily implies the existence of the facts themselves; and, that the massacre of the infants, which is the most important of them all, to confirm the truth of the rest, is elsewhere recorded*.

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* See Lardner's Cred. of the Gospel History, b. ii. ch. 2. throughout. See likewise even the express testimony of a Jew to the truth of this fact, quoted by Dr. G. Sharpe, in his "Argument for the Defence of Christianity, taken from the Concessions of its most antient Adversaries," p. 40. But the truth of these extraordinary facts is set in so clear a light by a French writer, that, upon this occasion, I hope to be forgiven the liberty of translating what he has said about them.

"Had the evangelist only told us, that the Wise Men saw a star in the East, which they believed to be the star of the *King* of the Jews, this would have appeared very suspicious. If he had said no more, than that the Wise Men came to Jerusalem, neither would this have been satisfactory. But he asserts, not only that they came there, but that they appeared there in public; and that the whole city of *Jerusalem* were greatly moved and astonished on *their* account. Is it very likely any one should take it into his head to attempt persuading so great a city as Jerusalem, that they had been thrown into a general consternation, by the appearance of certain Wise Men, who came purposely to worship the king of the Jews? When a man has determined to publish any falsehood, which it is of the utmost importance to him to procure the belief of, will he single out such circumstances to relate,

THE facts then being indisputably established, it is certain, from the nature of that enquiry, which these

late, as the people well know, are all utterly false? Matthew, who wrote this account, was himself a Jew. And for whom did he immediately design it? For many thousand Jews, converts to Christianity, who dwelt at *Jerusalem*, and who were as well acquainted with what had happened *there*, both in their own days, and those of their fathers, as the people of Paris are with what came to pass there under the administration of Cardinal Richlieu; or those of London, with what was transacted there in the time of Oliver Cromwell; or the people of Stockholm, with what happened in that city in the reign of Gustavus. And let us only consider, whether it would be possible for any one to publish such falsehoods in these populous cities, with such remarkable success as attended the relations we are now considering, so as by their means to engage many thousands to become parties in his cause."

"But granting, that the evangelist might have assurance enough to describe the Wise Men, and the astonishment they occasioned in all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, even in direct opposition to the well-known history of the times; it must at least be allowed, that the *subsequent* events, asserted to have happened in consequence of this, were of such a nature, that not even the most impudent and abandoned writer could have dared to make mention of them, had they not come to pass."

"In reality, this transaction contains two or three facts so closely connected in their own nature, that if we allow the truth of one, it will be impossible to deny the rest. If we agree, that the arrival of *some* Wise Men induced Herod to summon the great council of the Jews, in order to be assured where the Messiah should be born, we cannot possibly doubt whether

these apparent *Wise Men* from the East came to *Jerusalem* to make, that they could not be impostors,

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whether any such persons did actually appear. And if we allow, that Herod really sent his people to Bethlehem, to put to death all the children there of two years old and under, there can be no dispute about the answer given by the Sanhedrim to this enquiry. If, therefore, the truth of the chief fact may be relied on, there can be no need of any farther proof of the two other."

" Now I will venture to affirm, that if this chief event had not really come to pass, the evangelist could never have related it. For what was better known than the reign of Herod the Great? Even his most insignificant actions were all got abroad. How then could any one dare to charge *him*, *falsely*, with so astonishing and unheard-of a massacre as this? *Bethlehem* itself was still flourishing when the evangelist wrote his account of this transaction. So that, if his relation was not true, every inhabitant of that city could bear witness to its falsehood. Its distance from Jerusalem too was so small, that the Christians there could not possibly be ignorant of the reception this account met with at *Bethlehem itself*; especially as there was a very considerable intercourse carried on between the two cities. Nor was the time, which had elapsed between the birth of Jesus Christ and the writing of this Gospel, by any means sufficient to afford room for the reception of so extravagant a falsehood. I would only ask, whether we ourselves could be persuaded into the belief, that any particular monarch now reigning in Europe; or, if you please, one who reigned thirty or forty years since; had caused two or three thousand children to be put to death in the cradle, for the sake of destroying one in particular, whose future fortune

For, first, should we suppose *Joseph* and *Zacharias* actually engaged in the grand imposture, nothing can be more incredible, than that they should, at this time especially, be so industrious in contriving the most ready ways to betray it; by still making *so many more* persons acquainted with their whole design. And how could these veteran deceivers think of promoting their success, by sending any of their accomplices upon so dangerous, nay so mad an enterprize, as that of going purposely to acquaint *Herod* himself, with the actual birth of a young *King* of the Jews? Above all, where could they expect to find adventurers, daring and foolish enough to engage in so desperate an undertaking?

fortune he was afraid of? There is little likelihood indeed of our listening to such an imposition as this; or indeed that any one should publish such a falsehood; or even, that so strange a thought should even enter into any man's head. But that any one should be able to persuade the people of the *same* kingdom, and even the inhabitants of the *very place* where the scene is laid, into the belief of *such* a fact, *if it had never happened*, is above all incredible.*—See *Traité de la Vérité de la Religion Chrétienne*, par I. Abbadie; Par. ii. sect. 3. ch. 2.—The reasoning in this passage is perfectly just; but the number of children here mentioned, as supposed to have been put to death, is named at random, without any foundation. It is not reasonable to suppose, that the whole number of male children only under two years of age, in Bethlehem and its neighbourhood, could be large.

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THE least they could expect from the execution of such an embassy was, that, if Herod should refrain from putting them immediately to death, it would only be in order to place such spies upon all their motions, as they could not escape from; that so, when he had by these means detected their *insane king*, he might cut them *all off together*, and thus bring all their crafty devices to a very speedy conclusion.

NOR is it less evident from the conduct of *Herod*, and the *Jewish council*, that the *Wise Men* in question really *were not* impostors, than it is from the very nature of *that* enquiry they came to Jerusalem to make, that they *could not* be so.

CAN it be imagined, that a prince of *Herod's* penetration, policy, and passionate disposition, would suffer three or four persons, in the character of *Wise Men from the East*, to throw himself, and all Jerusalem with him, into suspense and astonishment, by daringly publishing even the actual birth of a *new King* of the Jews; and declaring they were come, by the guidance of heaven itself, to worship him; without immediately causing the very strictest enquiry to be made into their true country and character? Can we suppose *Herod*, above all men, would suffer his very throne to be shaken under him; without satisfying himself in the completest manner, that these

these unlooked-for and daring *harbingers* of the *new King*, were not a set of impostors? Could so politic a prince, on any account whatever, himself add dignity to their characters, and authority to their declarations; by treating them with so much outward respect, as even to summon the *great Council* of the priests*, to give a solemn answer to their enquiry; unless he had been thoroughly convinced, that they were in truth the very persons they pretended to be?

BEFORE he could resolve to follow so dangerous a course as this, which must unavoidably make the people in general so much more prone to tumults and revolts, he would certainly have taken every step necessary to detect so bold an imposition; and would have condemned the impostors, had they proved such, to the most cruel and ignominious deaths. Nor can it be believed, that all the most eminent members of the Jewish priesthood should be summoned, even by *Herod himself*, to give their opinion upon the place of

* "The chief priests were either those who had enjoyed the dignity of the high priesthood, which was now become elective and temporary, or the chiefs of the sacerdotal classes, the heads of the courses of priests appointed by David. The scribes were the interpreters of the law, and the public teachers of the nation."—Macknight, sect. 11.—See Lightfoot, Vol. I. 438, &c.

Christ's birth, on so unlooked-for, and surprizing an occasion, without enquiring very curiously into the true characters of those strangers, whose amazing declarations had been the *only* cause of *Herod's* calling them together.

BESIDES, from the cruel massacre of the infants, which *Herod* immediately proceeded to, upon the departure of the *Wise Men* from *Bethlehem*, without returning to him, it is evident, that his design in treating their enquiry with so much respect, was, merely to get the *young King* into his power, that he might then cut off him, and whoever appeared connected with him, at once. And this being unquestionably his real intention, had he not been most, thoroughly convinced, that the *Wise Men* in question were *not* impostors; had there been but the least room for any suspicion about it, his first care would have been to beset them with trusty persons when he sent them to *Bethlehem*, who certainly would have secured *Them* and their *infant King*, as soon as they pretended to have found him, and have brought them all back together to *Herod*, to be put to death at his pleasure. So that had not the *Wise Men*, whoever they really were, brought with them such clear credentials of the truth of their assumed characters and country, as freed them at once from the least suspicion of deceit, we may be sure they could

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not have escaped, either undetected, or unpunished.

BUT farther, had not such an attempt itself been far too dangerous for them to try, and had it been possible for them to have escaped; still it appears, that no impostors could have been sent on this occasion, with instructions to conduct themselves in *that* manner in which the *Wise Men* before us are found to have done.

IT was now some time since the birth of their intended counterfeit king. It had fallen out likewise, in consequence of an edict of the Roman Emperor, that he had been born in a city, where *Joseph* and *Mary* had not, *otherwise*, any intention that he should*. Whence it plainly appears,

* That *Joseph* and *Mary* had not originally formed any design of their own, that *Jesus* should be born at *Bethlehem*, is evident, not only from the *unexpected* occasion of their going thither, *Augustus's* decree for the taxing, but likewise from the other circumstances of his birth *there*. For it appears, that they did not come to *Bethlehem* till *so late*, that no room was to be had in the house, and *Mary* was actually delivered of *Jesus* in a *stable*. Whereas had *Joseph* and *Mary* been engaged in the plot supposed, and formed a *design* of having *Jesus* born at *Bethlehem*, in order to correspond with any received opinion of the birth-place of the *Messiah*; they would unquestionably have taken care to have been at *Bethlehem*, especially upon the publication of *such* a decree, *time enough* to have secured some more convenient, and *safer* place for *Mary's* delivery

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pears, that *They* knew nothing of an opinion, generally known and agreed in, that *Bethlehem* was *certainly* to be the *birth-place* of the *Messiah*. At the same time, Herod's assembling the great *Council* of the priests, upon this occasion, to give him their opinion, *where* the *Messiah* should be born, affords us another proof likewise, that this was a point by no means universally known and *determined*, at the time when the *Wise Men* in question appeared.

Now this point not being known to *Joseph* and his associates; nor so far determined, as to enable them to judge before-hand, with any tolerable degree of assurance, for *what* particular place *Herod's* answer would declare; it is clearly impossible that they could send counterfeits to Jerusalem, *at this time*, to enquire of Herod *where* the *Messiah* should be born?

FOR as to *Herod*, if he should choose to dissemble so far, as to return any answer to their en-

delivery, than the *stable* of an inn. They knew before-hand how extremely full the town would necessarily be upon this particular occasion; and as Zacharias had already performed his *public* part in the plot, and the farther prosecution of their design so absolutely depended upon Mary's *safe* delivery, they would unquestionably have taken *this* requisite and obvious precaution, at least, in order to have secured it.

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quiry, nothing less was to be expected, than that he would assemble the great *Council* of the priests, to determine the matter. And what must have been the consequence, if *Their* answer had fixed upon any other place, than *that* particular city, where, without the least view to the plot supposed, *Jesus* had been brought into the world? It is obvious, and must have been so to them, that the determination of this learned *Body* of the priests, whose opinions in all matters of religion were of the greatest weight and authority, would have been submitted to; as *decisive*, by the whole people; and all this artful long-laid design of setting up the son of *Mary* for the *Messiah*, and the counterpart of the plot with regard to *John*, must at once have been effectually quashed, and entirely put an end to.

HAD it therefore been possible for any company of deceivers, engaged in a confederacy with *Zacharias* and *Joseph*, to have come to Jerusalem at this time, under the assumed characters of *Wise Men from the East*; which, however, we have seen it was not; certain it is their errand could not now have been, to enquire of *Herod himself* where the *Messiah* should be born? But, to spread it among the people in general, where he actually was born. And the same star, which they pretended had guided them from the East to Jerusalem,

Jerusalem, would, without any difficulty, have been made to conduct them soon after to *Bethlehem* likewise; and by this means have saved them from that dangerous application to Herod, as well as from the hazard of receiving any such determination of the priests, with regard to the *birth-place* of the Messiah, as must necessarily have overthrown their long-laid design of setting up *Jesus* in his stead.

AND thus we have gone through the proposed examination, as well into the internal *nature* of the grand imposture in debate, as of several *particulars* that occur in the course of the whole transaction; and which, if there was any deceit at all in the case, must have been so many steps deliberately taken by those who contrived and carried it on. And while, on the one hand, the *design itself* has appeared, on every consideration, most extravagantly *absurd*, and *impossible* to have been conceived or undertaken; on the other, the *conduct* of every person concerned has proved itself, in several particulars, of the last importance to their success, directly *opposite* to what they must certainly have pursued, had they really been engaged in the prosecution of the *supposed* iniquitous deceit.

HERE therefore we may be allowed to repeat, upon the strength of *this* argument *only*, what has

already been as fully proved, in the first part, by *another*, that the plot, which we have all along been supposing, could not possibly have any *real* existence. But on the contrary, that the revelations, and other miracles recorded, as having accompanied the *births* of *Zacharias's* and *Mary's* sons, prove themselves to have *really* come to pass; and consequently, that the *sacred* and *prophetic* characters to which *John* and *Jesus* laid claim, must unquestionably have been their *true characters*, and in all respects *divine*.

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THE
DIVINE MISSIONS
OF
JOHN THE BAPTIST
AND
JESUS CHRIST.

PART III.

*The design of this part ; to consider the conduct of
John and Jesus ; with a view to their connection
with each other.*

AFTER having proved, in the first place, from the circumstances and situation of *all* those, who must have been the only contrivers of the imposture in debate, that *They* could not possibly have engaged in such a plot ; in the next, that the supposed plot itself is, in its own nature, so manifestly *absurd*, that it could never be entered into by *any* person whatever ; and farther, that *several* of the most important steps in the course of these transactions,

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are *such* as could *not* have been taken, even if the plot itself could really have existed; certainly nothing more can be necessary to establish the *miraculous* conceptions and births, and consequently, the *divine* characters of *John the Baptist* and *Jesus Christ*.

BUT we have not yet produced all the evidence in support of these points which the nature of the case will admit of, and the facts recorded in the Gospels afford. And since, in a matter of such importance to the everlasting interests of mankind, as the truth and certainty of a particular divine revelation, no argument, which the case can furnish to illustrate the truth, should be suffered to lie neglected; let us now go on to the examination of some other particulars, which naturally present themselves after those already considered, and which will prove a very considerable illustration of the points already established.

SINCE *John* and *Jesus* at length appeared together, in those *connected* characters, which it was prophetically asserted, at the time of their births, they were afterwards to assume, we may with good reason expect, that *their own* conduct, in all such particulars as any ways affected *each other's* character and reputation; or could have any influence on the final success of their *joint* design, will afford us some very strong circumstantial evidence

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dence of the truth or falsehood of their pretensions.

WHEN any one has determined to attempt deceiving mankind, by counterfeiting some public character of a very extraordinary nature; it is incredible that he should begin to enter upon action, without first settling, at least all the *principal* parts of that conduct, which he judges most likely to secure him from detection. When *more* than one have agreed to prosecute *jointly* any such iniquitous design, it is equally obvious, that they cannot be supposed to appear on the public stage, without having first *jointly* settled the whole scheme of their conduct, and allotted to each his particular plan.

THE more important and difficult the characters, which they intend to assume; and the better the people, whom they design to impose on, are qualified for detecting them; the greater care they will necessarily take in adjusting their distinct parts, and contriving all the particulars of importance in their *public* behaviour. More especially, as nothing is so apt to cause an immediate suspicion of some concerted deceit, as an apparent connexion between such as lay claim to the characters of inspired messengers from God; it cannot be imagined that such deceivers would determine to say, or do, any thing, which naturally tended to bring the
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the credit of *Either* into question. On the contrary, it must readily be allowed, that they would exert the utmost care, to avoid doing any thing, but what might help to promote the reputation and success of *Each Other*, in their joint undertaking.

SINCE therefore *John* and *Jesus* were so professedly connected together, that they reciprocally bore the most positive testimony to the divine character of each other; these considerations point out another method, in addition to those already made use of, for establishing the truth, or detecting the falsehood, of their claims. For from hence it is plain, that if we will suppose them to have been impostors, we must allow their whole *public* conduct to have been concerted between them, before they proceeded to the actual execution of their plot. So that if it should appear, that in several particulars of their public management, they took such steps as they must naturally think would prevent their mutual success; and that, in some instances of their joint and relative behaviour, *Each* pursued a very likely and obvious method to destroy the *Other's*, and even his own reputation; this likewise must be allowed a very strong collateral proof, that they could not be deceivers. With characters so extremely difficult to support, as those laid claim to by *John* and *Jesus*; and before a people so well qualified

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qualified, and so willing, as the Jews were to detect them, had they been pretenders; we may peremptorily pronounce, that no impostors whatever could have adopted such a conduct as this.

THE evangelists indeed have recorded but few instances of any public intercourse between the *Baptist* and *Jesus*; and as few public declarations of *Either*, immediately relating to the Other. Perhaps because there were in reality few more of importance to mention; perhaps because they were fully satisfied with mentioning those they have; in addition to that abundant proof of *John's* divine character, contained in the *miraculous* circumstances of his birth. But few as the particulars of this kind, handed down to us, are, these, when it is considered, that on the supposition of an imposture, they must have been preconcerted between them; will add no little strength to our former conclusion, and place the certainty of the *divine* original of *John* and *Jesus* even in a still stronger light than before.

SECTION I.

John wrought no miracles.

THE conduct and characters of *John the Baptist* and *Jesus Christ*, were in no particular more remarkably distinct than this; that whereas *Jesus* spent great part of his time in performing the most astonishing *miracles*, without number; the *Baptist*, we are expressly informed*, *never attempted to work any miracle at all.*

Now supposing them to have been joint impostors, *John* must have been as able to perform all *Jesus's* miracles as *Jesus* himself was. For, on this supposition, how astonishing soever these works may appear to us, and plainly beyond the reach of all power no less than the divine; to be consistent, we are obliged to confess, that at the bottom they could not be any thing more than mere tricks and delusions. It is clearly impossible likewise, for two deceivers to have agreed together upon so hazardous a design, without laying open to each other all the wiles and artifices

* John's Gosp. x. 14.

each

each was master of, and by the help of which *only* they could hope to carry it on.

If then they were deceivers, it must be allowed, that *John* knew how to work as many and as great apparent miracles as *Jesus* himself did. And consequently we must believe, that *his* never attempting to perform any, was in truth owing to private agreement, previously made between them, from a persuasion, that this artifice would conduce most to the success of their joint design.

Is it then credible *John* and *Jesus* could imagine, that the success of their plot would have been at all obstructed; should *John* have performed any of these astonishing works? At first sight, it seems evident, that deceivers, who were determined to attempt so difficult and unpromising an imposture, would gladly have made use of every expedient that could gain the good opinion of those they wanted to deceive. And since the peculiar part *John* undertook, was to prepare the people for the reception of *Jesus*, by assuring them of his divine authority, and prepossessing them, as much as possible, in *his* favour; what more natural, than for *John* himself to have exerted some of these extraordinary powers; the more effectually to gain credit to his own prophetic character; and consequently to all his declarations

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concerning his *Associate*, who was so soon to appear?

If they thought it necessary for procuring *Jesus's* success to send a messenger before him, to proclaim his speedy arrival, and prepare the Jews to receive him when he should come; they must unquestionably have been desirous to furnish this pretended *divine herald* with the best credentials in their power, that his embassy might be attended with the wished-for effect. Nor could they think, that *any other* expedient would be so eminently serviceable for this end, as the performance of some such seemingly *miraculous* works as we have just now seen, *John* must have been able to perform. Besides that great attention and reverence, which works of this kind were sure to excite, on their own account alone; they were what several of the *Old Prophets* had occasionally performed; and in particular, that very prophet *Elijah**, in whose spirit and power *Zacharias* had explicitly foretold, that *John would go before the Lord*.

THIS therefore would have been so far from inconsistent with that character, in which *John himself* was to appear, that it must have seemed highly probable to *Jesus* and *Himself*, if impostors, that

* 1 Kings, ch. xvii. and xviii. 2 Kings, ch. i. and 2.

the people might expect something of this kind at his hands. And whether they should require this or not; thus much was evident and certain, that nothing else could contribute so effectually to *John's* reception as a *true* prophet; and consequently to the establishment of *Jesus's* character by *his means*.

SINCE then *John* and *Jesus* could not but be sensible, that the performance of some seemingly great *miracles* would be highly instrumental in securing *John's* success, in his preparatory part of the plot; their previous agreement, that, notwithstanding this, *John* should abstain *entirely* from making use of them, must have arisen from some apprehension, that if he did not, this would interfere with *that* part, which *Jesus* himself was soon after to act; and thus, in the end, obstruct the success of the whole undertaking.

FROM what then could such an apprehension arise? No other assignable foundation for it occurs, than a doubt, whether, if *John* should work wonders as well as *Jesus*, the people might not be so far prejudiced in favour of *John*; especially as He was to appear *first* before them; as to believe, for the most part, that *John* himself was the Messiah; and therefore pay little regard to *Jesus*, when *he* came. Or, at least, that they might be so far kept in suspense between the Two, as never
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to give their hearty assent to Either; and by this means effectually prevent the final success of Both.

BUT these apprehensions, however plausible at first sight, could not possibly have any real existence. Had two such deceivers indeed started up at the same time, *without* any secret connection, *They* might have had some reason to apprehend the worst of these inconveniencies, unless they presently agreed to act in concert, and support each other. But as it is certain, that if *John* and *Jesus* were deceivers, they must from the beginning have concerted every step they took together; so we may be assured, that *They* could not be influenced by any such apprehensions as these.

THE more satisfactory proofs *John* could give of his *own* inspiration, the more effectually must *his* testimony have established the belief of *Jesus's* *divine mission*; and not of his divine mission only, but the precise nature and design of his *particular office*. Whatever influence *John's* authority might have, in determining the people, in *one* of these points, the same, it was to be expected, it would have, in the *other*. As *John's* declarations could have no weight with the Jews, in either of these particulars, but in consequence of their being persuaded, that *he* was commissioned *from above*,

above, to make known to them *whatever* he declared; it was natural to think, that his declarations would have the same weight, in *both* these points as in *either*. So that if *John* and *Jesus* were agreed in opinion, that it would be serviceable to their design, for *John* to appear as a divine messenger before the arrival of *Jesus*, and to bear witness to Him at all; and had not this been the case, *John* could not have appeared; they must, for the same reason, have thought it best for *John* to support his own divine character by *every* artifice in his power; and particularly, by *this* of performing great apparent *miracles*, in preference to every other.

HAD they even conceived the least suspicion of any such ill consequence from this conduct, as was just now suggested, nothing would have been easier than to prevent their mutual credit from interfering, by this means, in the least with each other. What more obvious, than that they would have agreed, that *John* should perform many works apparently miraculous; but that the *most* astonishing of all those they were able to contrive, such as seeming to give sight to those who had been *born blind*, and raising the *dead*; should be inviolably reserved for *Jesus's* hand *alone*. That *John*, in the mean time, should on all these occasions inculcate upon the people, the great superiority of power

power with which they would shortly see the *Messiah himself* endowed; and press this upon them as the infallible *criterion* of that superior divine character, which he was to teach them, belonged to *Jesus* alone. This would have been so *natural* an expedient, that they could not overlook it; and, at the same time, so extremely serviceable to their cause, that it is inconceivable they should decline making use of it.

AND besides this obvious and easy restriction, with regard to the *nature* of the works themselves, various expedients would have been hit on, by men of such subtilty and contrivance, as these must have been, to render *John's* miracles far less striking, than those even of the same kind, worked by *Jesus himself*, merely by means of their different *manners* of performing them.

IN some instances we find *Jesus* himself making use of apparent, though not adequate means to accomplish his works; in others, not having recourse to any. Sometimes he required certain qualifications in the persons themselves for whom he was about to work them, as necessary assistances for the success of his own endeavours; at others he peremptorily pronounced the word, and the work was performed. Some he chose to complete in an instant, others were accomplished but by degrees. Upon some occasions he openly implored
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assistance from heaven, as if it was God alone who really performed every thing he himself seemed to do; on others he thought fit to act, as if he himself was actually endowed with the fulness of divine power.

IT is not only a *probable supposition* therefore, that many different methods of working the same kind of miracles *would* have occurred to *John* and *Jesus*, at the settling of their respective parts, in the execution of their plot; but it is an undeniable *matter of fact*, that they actually *must*. It is evident likewise, that though every work conceived to be miraculous necessarily implies the exertion of *divine* power; yet some miracles, in the *nature* of the things themselves, may be far more astonishing than others; and even the same kind of miracles may be performed by different persons, in a *manner* so unequally calculated to surprize, as to make the spectators naturally conceive far more exalted notions of the One than the Other.

So that, by taking in the performance of apparent *miracles* to his aid, but confining himself, all the while, to those of the least stupendous and astonishing nature, and working even these in the most diffident and humble manner; *John* might, with much greater assurance have expected to establish his own credit, and prepare the people

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for acknowledging the divine mission of *Jesus*, than he could hope to accomplish these ends *without them*. And the miracles, which *John* might have performed under these obvious restrictions, would have been so far from involving the Jews in doubt and perplexity, about the difference between the character of *Jesus* and *his own*, that his repeated declarations of himself, as being *only* the *Messiah's Forerunner*; and of *Jesus* as being the *true Messiah*; strengthened by *Jesus's* more astonishing works, and superior all-powerful manner of performing them; would have induced the Jews to acquiesce with greater readiness, and certainty, in *Their distinct* pretensions. For, as *John's* divine authority would, *by this means*, have been more assuredly established; so it was to be expected, that his pre-emptory, explicit declarations of *Jesus's* peculiar character, as well as *his own*, would be more implicitly believed.

How then can it be conceived, that *They*, who, if impostors, were masters of so complete an art of working wonders, as no other impostors ever possessed; and who depended ultimately for success, upon the use they should make of those wondrous works, more than any thing else, as *Jesus* himself often declared; how can it be believed *They* could agree, that *John* should entirely abstain from making the least use of them, when they would

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would have been so immediately capable of doing the greatest service to the cause? Nothing less than the most evident *danger* resulting from them, could persuade an impostor to forego the pleasure of putting in practice so exquisite an art; and in the case before us, instead of any ill consequence to fear from it, there was a very evident, and strong reason for *John's* making use of it. The benefit to be expected from it, was so *great*, that they must both have been exceedingly desirous to make *John's* application of it subservient to the rest of their plot; and the expedients, by which this might have been done, were so *obvious* and *easy*, that they could not escape their observation.

HAD *John* and *Jesus* been impostors, we should therefore undoubtedly have received accounts of *many miracles* performed by *John*; though neither so numerous, nor astonishing as those of *Jesus* himself. And had this ever caused the Jews to enquire, in a manner similar to what they did upon another occasion; why He performed these miracles, if he was not the *Messiah*? His answer was ready, and would have been of singular service to the whole joint undertaking.—I indeed (he would have said) do perform those miraculous works, which have excited your admiration, and caused this enquiry; but there standeth one among

you, whom ye knew not; *He* it is, who will perform much *greater* works before you than I am able to do. But these works, that I do, are abundantly sufficient to convince you of *my own* divine authority; and consequently to satisfy you, that *He alone*, whom I have so often pointed out to you as such, is the *true Messiah*; as well as that *I myself* am his immediate *Forerunner*.

SECTION II.

The different external characters of John and Jesus considered.

IF *John* and *Jesus* were joint deceivers, it is certain, not only from the nature of their design itself, but likewise from those very distinct and remarkable kinds of life, they Each adopted; that they did not begin to shew themselves to the people, without having first deliberately agreed to assume *such* particular characters, as appeared to them best calculated for promoting their plot. For besides, that this was a matter of such importance as they could not neglect; the *characters*, they actually appeared in, were so *extraordinary* in themselves, and so directly *opposite* to each other, that they could not proceed from any thing but a preconcerted *design*.

FROM the very beginning *John* practised all imaginable austerity; making his first public appearance in a covering* of camels hair, tied with a leathern girdle; living with the most singular abstemiousness, upon locusts, and wild honey; and se-

* Matthew iii. 4.

cluding himself, in great measure, from the common intercourse of life. Nor did he himself only most rigorously adhere to all the religious rites and ordinances, practised by the severest sect among the Jews, the Pharisees; but he obliged all his own disciples, who associated at all with him, to do the same. Whence the Pharisees themselves put the question to *Jesus*; "Why do * the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thou eat and drink?" Such was the *solitary* and *mortified* life of *John*, from the beginning of his public appearance in the character of the *Baptist*.

Jesus, on the contrary, was the reverse of all this. He assumed a character, not only void of all severity and restraint, but spent his whole time in a most *uncommon* manner, in seeking the society of, and conversing familiarly with, all ranks and orders of the people. And so far was he from complying with the superstitious ceremonial of any of the prevailing sects, but more especially the rigid Pharisees; or exhorting his disciples to conform, in the least, to them; that, on all occasions, he himself constantly broke through them, and both publicly and privately inveighed against them. Society was what he

* Luke v. 33.

fought

sought above all things; even with the most despised
 sort of men; and such as lay under a general re-
 proach; and with these, and all others, he ate,
 and drank, and conversed, just as opportunities
 offered; without the least reservedness or restraint.
 From his very first appearance in the character of
 the *Messiah*, he had a view, not only to retirement,
 but even to domestic life; and might be said to live
 perpetually in the public view of mankind. So that
 retirement and a solitary life did not more remarkably
 distinguish the character of *John*, than social inter-
 course with all ranks of men, and a steady com-
 plication with all their various and dissipated
 ways, he said to mark out the peculiar conduct
 of *Jesus*. It is evident that it is not of world that
 he is. Now it is plainly impossible for two *opposed*
discreet persons, to have resolved on two *quite singular*
and opposite characters as these; and more espe-
 cially upon one so severe and disagreeable as that
 of the *Baptist*; unless they thought it indis-
 pensably necessary for the accomplishment of their
 design, and for that very reason pitched upon
 them. It is evident likewise, that whatever other
 considerations might contribute to determine their
 choice; the *first* and *principal* design, which they
 could never lose sight of, must have been, to
 single out such a character for *Each*, as would
 appear to correspond with, and fulfil, those pro-

phetical revelations concerning them, which had been published by *Zacharias* and *Mary*, about the time of their births. While we suppose them to have been impostors, these predictions, as we have already seen, must be acknowledged as the beginning and foundation of the whole plot. So that they were now under an absolute necessity of paying the strictest regard to *them*; and could neither forget nor neglect to do it.

Is then *either* of those singular characters, which we find they actually adopted, and especially that of *Jesus*, should prove, upon consideration, in any striking and capital particulars, wholly inconsistent with, and even *contradictory* to, what they themselves must know to be the commonly received sense of those predictions, which had been at first made public concerning them; this again must be allowed another very strong presumptive argument, and indeed a *conclusive* one, that they could *not* be impostors.

ZACHARIAS'S prophetical declaration concerning *Jesus*, at the time of John's circumcision, was as follows: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; " for he hath visited and redeemed his people; " and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us, " in the house of his servant David; as he spake " by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have " been since the world began; that we should be " saved

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“ saved from our enemies, and from the hand of
 “ of all that hate us: to perform the mercy pro-
 “ mised to our fathers, and to remember his holy
 “ covenant: the oath which he swore to our father
 “ Abraham; that he would grant unto us, that we
 “ being delivered out of the hands of our enemies,
 “ might serve him without fear, in holiness and
 “ righteousness before him, all the days of our
 “ life *.”

Agreeable to this, but more full and ex-
 press, was the revelation of the *Angel to Mary*.
 “ And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb,
 “ and shalt bring forth a son, and shalt call his
 “ name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be
 “ called the son of the Highest; and the Lord God
 “ shall give unto him the throne of his father
 “ David. And he shall reign over the house of
 “ Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall
 “ be no end †.”

In what sense the Jews at this time interpreted
 the predictions of the *Holy Prophets*, mentioned
 by *Zacharias*, and God's promises to *Abraham*, is
 well known. In the person of the *Messiah*, they
 universally expected a *temporal prince*; who should
 deliver them out of the hands of their enemies,
 and raise them to an universal monarchy, which

* Luke i. 68—75.

† Luke i. 30—33.

could

could never be overturned*. And since the prophecies concerning *Jesus*, just now quoted, were plainly such as coincided with this general opinion; and *Zacharias* and *Mary*, who made them public, could not but know, that they would be universally understood in this sense; and no other; if they were forgeries, their design in them must necessarily have been, that *Jesus* should assume such a character, as the predictions they delivered* would be universally understood to foretell. After the same reason; when *Jesus* himself came afterwards to deliberate upon a plan for his usual public conduct; he must have been clearly convinced, that no behaviour whatever would be looked upon as agreeable to those prophecies, which he knew it was absolutely incumbent upon him to fulfill; unless he plainly intimated a design of setting himself up, at some proper opportunity, for their temporal King.

Was that remarkable kind of life, then, that *Jesus* actually adopted, such as might probably induce the Jews to conclude, he entertained that design; or did he ever make any particular declarations to promote this belief? On the con-

* This is abundantly evident; not only from the behaviour of the people in general to *Jesus*, but even of his disciples themselves, in a variety of instances throughout the Gospels. See likewise Lardner's Cred. &c. b. i. ch. 5.

trary,

trary, his constant and familiar intercourse, not only with the lowest orders of the people, but with the *Phariseans* more especially, who were looked upon as infamous by the Jews; was a principal part of his conduct, plainly calculated to deprive him of all outward respect and honour; and to prevent the Jews, as much as possible, from entertaining any exalted notions about him. As the same time it appears, he never threw out any such crafty insinuations, as an impostor, in this case, would not have failed to do; calculated to lead the people on with an opinion, that he was *not* without such designs, as they believed the *Messiah* would certainly put in practice; though the proper season for their execution was not yet arrived. Nay when, after having miraculously fed a great multitude, he saw they began to be persuaded, that he must be the *Messiah*; and for that reason were proposing to set him up immediately for their *King*; he industriously prevented it, by dispersing them; and to avoid any farther attempts of the same kind, immediately left the place*. And at length, even when his death was just approaching, he solemnly closed the scene with an explicit declaration to *Pilate*, that he laid no claim to any *earthly kingdom*.

* John iv. 15, &c.

† John xviii. 36.

COULD any conduct have been more *opposite* than this to the sense, in which *he well knew* the Jews must have understood those remarkable prophecies of his life and actions, which had been made public by *Zachariah* and *Mary*; as well as to their universal opinion of *that* conduct, which the *Messiah* was to pursue. From beginning to end, it is evident, he persisted in a regular *opposition* to their in-
terstate opinions of *both*; and yet never attempted to convince them, or even so much as insinuated to them, that they were at all mistaken in their interpretation of *either*.

BUT perhaps a suspicion may here arise, that because these prophecies had been given out no less than near *thirty years* before *Jesus* began to appear in public; therefore he might on this account determine, that there was no necessity to pay any regard to them; as predictions long since forgotten, and of no concern. Or perhaps, it may possibly be objected, *Jesus* might think the knowledge of them was confined within so narrow a circle, that on this account likewise they were not worthy of his regard.

HERE it is obvious to remark, what we have seen the truth of long ago, that all the events said to have accompanied *Jesus's* conception, his *birth*, his *presentation* in the temple, and especially his being sought after by the *Wise Men*; must certainly have

have been known, at the time, to *great* numbers of the Jews. It is likewise as confessedly obvious, that *John* and *Jesus* could not but expect the memory of all these particulars to be *revived*, as soon as the claim to the divine characters they assumed, should become an object of the public attention. And as to the *prophecies*, in particular, which had been at first made public about them; the number of years which had elapsed, since the time when they were given out, was a circumstance so far from making it the *less desirable* to fulfill them; that, on the contrary, it was the most *fortunate* circumstance, that could attend them. Such a one indeed, as any impostors, in their case, must have wished for, if it had not existed. For the longer it had been since such prophecies were delivered, before the time for their accomplishment arrived; the greater certainly must their *authority* be; and consequently the more desirous an impostor must have been to fulfill them.

BUT, besides all these considerations, the character assumed by the *Baptist* will very clearly convince us, that, in fact, *Jesus* and *He* did not look upon it as *unnecessary* for them to do *all* in their power to fulfill the prophecies in question.

It is not now to be proved, that if *John* and *Jesus* were deceivers, their public conduct and characters must in the beginning have been debated and

and agreed on, between them *Both*. And had they been of opinion, for any reasons whatever, that it was *not* necessary for *Jesus himself* to pay any regard to those prophecies, which had been so long before spread abroad concerning him; for the same reasons, they would have determined it to be *unnecessary* for *John* likewise; especially as he had but the inferior part to act.

It must be observed too, at the same time, that *John's* whole character consisted in the practice of so much apparent sanctity, at least, and *real* severe mortification, as it is incredible any impostor would have consented to undergo, unless he thought it absolutely *requisite* for the success of his undertaking. Yet *John*, we find, adhered *minutely* to *these* prophecies, which had been given out by *Zacharias* concerning him; nay, he even exceeded what could have been expected from him, on their account, in the severity of his life and manners.

It had been foretold, that he should "go before the Lord in the spirit and power of *Elias*:" And this he so particularly fulfilled, as even to appear like *Elias*, in his very garb itself.

It

* As appears from Matthew iii. 4. "And the same John had his raiment of camels hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins;" when compared with 2 Kings, i. 7, 8.—"And he,"

It had been said, that he should drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he lived in the desert upon locusts and wild honey*; and preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, was, as it had been foretold†, the constant employment of his public life. So that while *Jesus*, as we have seen already, was acting in *direct opposition* to the received opinion of all the prophecies, which had been given out concerning *him*; and this, in those parts of his conduct, which must be expected to have the greatest influence upon his followers; *John* was practising without interruption the *most severe mortifications*; *merely* to *fulfill* those predictions, which had been originally made public concerning *him*.

BUT what principles can possibly explain, or reconcile, so opposite a conduct as this; in two impostors *jointly* embarked in the prosecution of

"he," *Ahasiah*, "said unto them, what manner of man was he, which came to meet you, and told you these words?" And they answered him, he was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, it is "Elijah the Tishbite." John's garment of camels hair was probably the sackcloth with which penitents and mourners used to cover their loins, and sometimes their whole bodies; 1 Chron. xxi, 16.—Macnight's Harm. sect. 14.—See Hammond on Matthew iii.

* Compare Luke i. 15. with Matt. iii. 4. and Mark i. 6.

† Compare Luke iii. 3; &c. with Luke i. 76, 77.

one and the same design? The adapting of their characters to the prophecies in question, was evidently a particular which *all* impostors must have regarded, as of the utmost importance to their future success. It was likewise a point in which the success of *Both* was *equally* concerned, with this difference only; that as the issue of the whole undertaking depended finally upon the reception, which *Jesus himself* might be able to procure; so the failure of *Jesus*, in this most important particular, would have been more solicitously guarded against by all impostors, than that of *John*. So that had *John* and *Jesus* been impostors, we may rest fully satisfied, that *Both* of them would have contrived the characters they assumed, in such a manner as to answer the prophecies in question; or, had *this* been possible, *Neither*. And even could the nature of the case have permitted, that *One* of them might neglect this precaution, while they thought it was absolutely necessary for the *Other* to observe it; it must certainly have been *John*, who was left at liberty to choose, instead of *Jesus*.

THE conduct of *Jesus* therefore, in regard to this important particular; when considered, as the nature of the case necessarily requires it should be, in conjunction with that of *John*; appears absolutely irreconcilable with the supposition of their

their joint imposture; and this inconsistency in their different characters, when viewed in its proper light, affords us another decisive argument, that they could not possibly be deceivers.

BUT might they not entertain hopes of succeeding more universally, it may be said, with *all* ranks and orders among the *Jews*; by means of those contrary characters, which they assumed? The Jewish people being divided, as it were, into separate bodies; of which the leading sects were very exact and rigorous in their observance of all fastings, and numberless external rites of religion; while the rest paid much less regard to these rigid institutions; it may possibly be conceived, that *John* and *Jesus* purposely assumed those opposite characters in which they appeared, in order the more effectually to ingratiate themselves with *all* sects and persuasions. Perhaps it may even be thought, that *Jesus himself* seems to have betrayed some such design, in this particular exclamation. “Whereunto shall I liken
 “this generation? It is like unto children sitting
 “in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,
 “and saying; we have piped unto you, and ye
 “have not danced; we have mourned unto you,
 “and ye have not lamented.—For John came
 “neither eating, nor drinking, and they say he
 “hath a devil. The son of man came eating and
 “drinking; and they say, behold a man glut-

"tonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans, and sinners: but wisdom is justified of all her children *."

Now had this been their view, it will not be denied, that it must have been *John's* intended part, to apply himself assiduously to gaining over the *Pharisees*, and other powerful sects, by means of his conformity to their favourite superstitions: while *Jesus* was to win upon the *people* in general, by his neglect of such rigid formalities, and unreserved condescension. In the mean time, it must have been a constant and principal part of the care of *Both*, to avoid every thing that had the least apparent tendency to interfere with, and obstruct the success of *Each Other*.

Does it then in fact appear, that *John* did apply himself more especially to procure the favour and protection of the most powerful and rigid *Sects*? Quite the contrary. He had all the opportunity for attempting it he could hope for. He no sooner begun to preach and baptize, than the Pharisees and Sadducees, struck with the novelty of his appearance and manner, came in great numbers, with the rest of the people, about him. Did he then receive these haughty guests with any peculiar marks of reverence and respect? Did he do, or

* Matthew xi. 16—19.

even say, any thing, on this wished-for occasion, that might flatter *their* pride, and dispose them to entertain a favourable opinion of him and his pretensions?

ON the contrary, he began immediately to rebuke *them*, and *even them in particular*, with the greatest severity, in the presence of the whole multitude; as it were declaring war against them, and openly setting them at defiance. "Then went out " to him (*John the Baptist*) Jerusalem, and all " Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, " and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing " their sins. But when he saw many of the PHARISEES and SADDUCEES come to his baptism, he " said unto THEM; O generation of vipers, who " hath warned you to flee from the wrath to " come*?" Nothing could be more opposite, than this conduct, to the design just supposed; nor was any thing else to be expected from it, but what actually happened†; that while the *people*, and the publicans, submitted cheerfully to his baptism, the *Pharisees* and *rulers* almost universally rejected and opposed it.

IN the mean time, so far was *Jesus* from being cautious of giving offence to the leading sects; that he might not obstruct the *Baptist*, in his endeavours to gain them; that *He* likewise seized

* Matthew iii. 5, 6, 7.

† Luke vii. 29, 30.

every opportunity of exposing even their pretended virtues, as well as apparent vices: and as his own conduct was in every respect diametrically opposite to theirs; so he was continually pointing *them* out to the people, as the proper objects of their aversion and contempt. Nor was this behaviour, either in *John* or *Jesus*, the sudden effect of unguarded passion, or surprise; but their cool, constant, and deliberate choice. So that, as nothing could be more inconsistent with *that* conduct they would certainly have observed, had they agreed on their respective characters with the design just suggested; and as *this* design is the only one *capable* of reconciling their characters to the supposition of any imposture at all; we must necessarily confess, that the peculiar conduct both of *Jesus* and of *John**, when considered separately

* Had the opposite characters and conduct of John and Jesus, with regard to all the religious rites and ceremonies, which were observed by the different sects of the Jews, been owing to any private agreement between them; as it *must* have been if they were deceivers; this at least we might certainly depend on, that *Each* would have taken care to prevent *his own* disciples from publicly raising objections, on this account, to the *Other*. But, on the contrary, we find, that when *Jesus* was dining with Levi, and a great number were present; then “came to him the disciples of John, saying, why do we and the Pharisees fast oft; and thy disciples fast not?” Matt.

ix. 14.

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ately in its own nature, and jointly in their relation to each other ; affords us one of the strongest collateral proofs, we can possibly desire, that *They* could not be engaged in the prosecution of a *deceit*.

ix. 14. And from Mark ii. 18. it appears, that they joined with the *Pharisees* in raising this particular objection to *Jesus's* conduct. Whereas had *Jesus* and *John* been associates, it was impossible that *Either* should have been so negligent of their common success, as to suffer his own disciples, for want of proper information, to join with their *common enemies* in raising objections to the credit of the *Other*. For there is not the least room to suppose, that this might be an artful expedient designed to make the *Pharisees* better pleased with *John* ; since we have seen, that the whole conduct of *John*, as well as *Jesus*, on every important occasion, was such as they knew would procure them the utter hatred and aversion of the *Pharisees*.

SECTION III.

A prophecy of John's, concerning Jesus, considered.

THE *only* design *John* and *Jesus* could possibly be engaged in, supposing there could be any plot in the case, was a deep-laid design of counterfeiting the two last prophets the Jews ever expected to behold: and one of whom especially, was to be by far the most accomplished, in all prophetical endowments, of any they had ever seen. And had *They* really undertaken such an attempt as this; nothing can be more obvious, than that it would have been one constant, and chief object of their care, *not to foretell* any thing, and more especially any thing relating to *Each Other*, by which their prophetical knowledge might possibly be brought into question.

THIS was manifestly a point of such importance, as they could not but very carefully attend to, from their very first entrance upon the execution of their design. If they were desirous of seeming to *foretell* any thing concerning *Each Other*, as by divine inspiration; in order the more effectually to support the delusion; they must first
privately

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privately have agreed upon some particular actions, which the One could safely undertake to perform; and the Other might therefore securely venture to foretell. To have hazarded any *prediction*, without this obvious and necessary precaution, would have been contriving the surest method of exposing their want of all real inspiration, and laying open their imposture to the public view.

SHOULD it appear then, that *John* actually foretold of *Jesus*, upon a very remarkable occasion, and as an infallible token whereby to distinguish *him* for the *true Messiah*; that *Jesus* would introduce a certain most remarkable kind of religious rite; totally different from what *John* himself made use of for the same purpose: and should it likewise be found, that *Jesus*, during his whole life, never so much as attempted to put in practice any such rite; nor ever alleged any reason for declining it; nay, nor ever made the least mention of it: this surely must be acknowledged as another convincing proof, that *John* and *Jesus* could *not* be the impostors supposed.

WHEN *John* made his first public appearance in the country round about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; the whole multitude, we find, came forth to be

baptized of him, and to learn from him the means of salvation*. “And †,” at this time, “as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not; John answered, saying unto them all;—I indeed baptize ‡ you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He SHALL BAPTIZE YOU WITH THE HOLY GHOST AND WITH FIRE.” And soon after this prediction, when *Jesus* was come to *John*, and like the rest of the people had been baptized§ by him; to prevent the possibility of any doubt, about *his* being the person, whose institution of this unheard-of kind of baptism, *John* had particularly pointed out; in order that they might know *Him* by this sign to be the *true Messiah*; “*John* bare witness of him, and cried, saying; this was he, of whom I spake, he that cometh after me is preferred before me; for he was before me||.”

* Matthew iii. 1, &c. Mark i. 3, &c. Luke iii. 2—14.

† Luke iii. 15, 16. Compare Matt. iii. 11. Mark i. 7, 8. And John i. 33.

‡ For the nature and end of John's Baptism, see Lightfoot, Vol. II. p. 121, &c. See also Macknight's, sect. 14. note.

§ Matthew iii. 13—17.

|| John i. 15. and i. 26—34.

NOTHING

Nothing could be more remarkable, on its own account, than the particular *kind* of baptism here foretold; nor could any occasion be of greater importance, than that on which this prophecy was delivered. *John* had just begun to baptize, in order to prepare the people for giving *Jesus's* high pretensions a more favourable reception, when, contrary to his views, they began already to imagine, that *John himself* might be the *Messiah*.

SUCH a persuasion, should it have continued, must unavoidably have broke in upon their plan, and prevented the success of their whole design. Since *John*, who first set out as the *Messiah's Fore-runner*, could not assume the character of the *Messiah himself*; how willing soever the people might be to give it him; without effectually proving himself an impostor, in so barefaced a manner, as could not long escape the notice of any intelligent observer.

It was therefore of the utmost importance to prevent this opinion from gaining ground. And to shew how sensible *John* himself was of the necessity of doing it, in the most effectual method; we find him solemnly declaring to all that came to him; that though " he did indeed baptize with water, he was *not* the *Messiah*; but that

" one

"one mightier than he," who was indeed the Messiah, would very speedily appear. At the same time, to give them the lowest comparative opinion of his own character, and the most exalted one of *Jesus*; he tells them, he himself was so far from being the *Messiah*, that he was not even worthy to unloose the very latchet of his shoes.

It was impossible to set the superior excellence and dignity of *Jesus's* character above *his own*, in a stronger light. Yet lest his own positive denial of the high office which they were inclined to ascribe to him, should not be sufficient to put an end to their doubts; he proceeds likewise to give them a *sign*, by which they might distinguish the *Messiah*, not from himself only, but from every pretender to his character; and by which they would shortly be convinced, that *Jesus* was *he*. "I indeed," says he, "baptize you with water;" a ceremony which you yourselves have long since adopted in the admission of proselytes into your own religion*: thereby declaring myself a real prophet, commissioned from on high. But the *Messiah* himself, when the proper time arrives, will baptize you in a manner totally different from all

* See Lightfoot, ii. 121, &c. Lewis, Antiq. Heb. b. iv. ch. 2.

that

that have gone before him ; namely, " with the
" Holy Ghost, and with fire."

THE only effect, which this remarkable prophecy could have, upon those to whom it was delivered, was, to make them believe, that the *true Messiah* would, at some time or other, institute such a kind of baptism, as this prophecy plainly described ; and consequently to make them reject every pretender to this character, and *Jesus* among the rest, if *He* should not. And as this was the *only possible* effect it could be attended with, it must have been the only one, which *John* himself could wish, or intend it to have.

If therefore *John* was an impostor he could not have foretold this remarkable particular of his *Association* in the deceit supposed ; unless it had been before agreed on between them ; and the manner, in which *Jesus* was to perform it, had been already determined. And had *John* delivered this prophecy in consequence of such a previous agreement, *Jesus* could not afterwards have neglected to fulfill it, when at length *He* appeared. It is evident, this would have been purposely betraying their plot, at their very entrance upon it. For how could *John* hope to maintain the reputation of a prophet, when *Jesus's* conduct should appear plainly to falsify his most positive, and explicit predictions concerning him ? Or if *John's*
established

established credit should, notwithstanding, be able to keep its ground; what could possibly save *Jesus* from being rejected, as a convicted impostor?

JOHN had not only assured the people, that the *true Messiah* would baptize, with the *Holy Ghost* and with *fire*; but likewise, that *Jesus* was *that very Messiah* of whom he spoke. And yet *Jesus*, from his first public appearance to his death, never signified so much as even an intention of introducing *this* new kind of baptism among them*. Had the people reflected upon this apparent contradiction

* Perhaps it may not be improper to observe, that the completion of this prophecy on the day of Pentecost, can be no objection to what has been said; *since this* accomplishment of it happened not till after *Jesus's death*: whereas John's prophecy relating to it, was so expressed, and delivered on such an occasion, that he must think the people would understand him to mean, a particular kind of baptism, which *Jesus* would introduce during his life. Besides, nothing can be more absurd and ridiculous, than it would be to suppose *impostors* foretelling of one another something that they would *do after their death*; in order to promote the success of their plots, while they were *alive*.

Neither can it be any objection to the force of this argument, that the true meaning of the prophecy itself is far from being certain, as we would seem to make it. For, with regard to the present point, the question is not, whether learned men have given the prophecy different interpretations, many ages since

tradition (and what more likely to have happened?) it would alone have been sufficient to make them reject the pretensions of *Both* to all divine inspiration; if they had indeed been *deceivers*; because then they could have had no means whatever of reconciling the prediction, to the want of its accomplishment.

UNLESS therefore we can believe, that two impostors, who set out upon a *joint* undertaking; the very being and success of which necessarily depended upon their mutually supporting the credit of *Each Other*; should agree to begin their parts in such a manner, as was evidently calculated to destroy the credit of *Both*; this single prophecy of the *Baptist's*, when considered jointly with the conduct of *Jesus*, must alone be sufficient to shew, that *John* and *Jesus* could not possibly be *deceivers*.

since it was delivered; but what sense *John* himself must have believed the *people* would understand it in, when he delivered it. This alone was what an *impostor* would have attended to, and could not but attend to; because upon *this* must depend the future opinion of the people, whether it was really fulfilled or not. And the slightest consideration of the prophecy itself, and the occasion on which it was delivered, shews at once, that the *Jews*, who heard *John* pronounce it, could not but understand it in that sense, in which it has here been represented. As indeed, that this was its true sense, appears undeniably, from what *Jesus* said to his disciples after his resurrection, Acts i. 4, 5.

NOR

NOR was this all. *John* not only seemed plainly to foretell, that *Jesus* would institute a *new*, and very extraordinary kind of baptism, which *Jesus* during his life on earth, never did; but he likewise expressed himself so as to leave it highly probable, the people would understand him to mean, that *Jesus* would *not* make use of the same baptism he himself had adopted; which notwithstanding *Jesus* soon after did.

WHEN *John* declared; in order to make the people fully sensible of the great difference, they would perceive, between the *Messiah* and *Himself*; that *He* indeed baptized them with *water*, but that the *Messiah* would baptize them with the *Holy Ghost* and with *fire*; what more natural for *John* to think the people would conclude him to mean, than, that the *Messiah* would *not* make use of baptism with *water*, for the admission of *his* disciples? This the turn and manner of the declaration itself, as well as the occasion on which it was delivered, it is obvious, seemed to render extremely probable. Had *John* therefore been an impostor connected with *Jesus*; and had it been agreed between them that *Jesus* should nevertheless baptize with *water* too; it is utterly incredible, that *John* could have omitted making express mention of this particular; that the people might not immediately judge him convicted of having prophesied a lie; when they should

should see *Jesus* baptizing with *water* as well as Himself.

HAD they been joint deceivers, instead of saying what he did, *John* would certainly have declared, "I indeed baptize you with water, AS THE MESSIAH HIMSELF LIKEWISE WILL; but he will MOREOVER baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." For what opinion could *John* otherwise expect the people to form of his own inspiration; when they should see *Jesus's* disciples, soon after, baptizing the people with water, under the immediate inspection of their Master; and this even in greater numbers than *John* himself had done? "After these things came *Jesus* and his disciples into the land of Judea, and there he tarried with them, and baptized." And presently we are informed, that "*Jesus* made and baptized," there "more disciples than *John* *."

TRUE indeed it is, that *Jesus himself* did not baptize, but only his disciples; as the evangelist expressly says †. But this circumstance could make no difference either as to his adopting *this* particular ceremony, for the admission of his own disciples; or the interpretation, which the people must naturally be expected to put upon it. It is plain, from the evangelist's manner of relating this, that

* John iii. 22. and iv. 1.

† John iv. 2.

he had no conception, that this circumstance made any alteration in the case; for then he would have taken care to remark it. Nor is it less evident, that the *Baptist's* own disciples, and even the *Baptist himself*, considered it in the same light, as if *Jesus* had performed the ceremony with his own hands. For, while *Jesus* was baptizing in this manner, *John's* disciples came, and said unto him*; “Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.”

BUT, had they looked upon it as a circumstance, which made any difference in the case, that *Jesus himself* did not actually baptize, but only his disciples; certainly they would not have failed to observe it, on this occasion, to their master. As, on the other hand, had this been an agreed particular between *Jesus* and *John*, in order to save the credit of *John's* divine inspiration; *John* would now at least have made *that* use of it, for which it was contrived; by teaching his disciples to reconcile *his own* predictions to *Jesus's* conduct; which was, *seemingly*, in every particular, so contradictory to it.

* John iii. 26.

AND

AND now considering both these particulars, as the nature of the case requires we should, in one connected view; first, that *John* expressly foretold, as a touchstone of *Jesus's* being the true *Messiah*, that *Jesus* would adopt a new and very singular kind of baptism; which however, from his first public appearance to his death, He never did, nor ever mentioned a design of doing it: and in the next place, that *John* expressed himself in such a manner, as he could not but think, might very probably make the people understand him to mean, that *Jesus* would not baptize with water; which, however, *Jesus* presently after did, even in a greater degree than *John* himself had done: when we consider all this, how is it possible to believe *John* and *Jesus* to have been conspiring impostors?

HAD they been such, *John* could not have foretold any part of *Jesus's* conduct, in order to convince the people, that *He* was the *Messiah*; which *Jesus* had not before agreed with him, for this very purpose, to perform. Nor could *Jesus*, after such an agreement, lay aside the design of doing any thing, which he had before agreed, that *John* should foretel; without giving him timely notice of the alteration of his designs. For though we have no authority to believe, that the Jews did, in fact, ever object to the truth of their divine pretensions,

tensions, on account of this seeming contradiction, between *Jesus's* baptism, and *John's* prophecy concerning it; yet was it, from the nature of the thing, so extremely probable, that they would; and, at all times, so very possible that they might; that no *impostors* can be supposed capable of deliberately exposing themselves, *for no end whatever*, to so manifest a hazard of detection.

SECTION IV.

Jesus baptized by John.

VERY soon after *John* had delivered the prophecy just considered, concerning the nature of *Jesus's* baptism, we meet with another very remarkable transaction, which will serve to throw still greater light upon their *true characters*, and the *connexion* really subsisting between them.

“ THEN cometh *Jesus* from Galilee to Jordan,
 “ unto *John*, to be baptized of him. But *John*
 “ forbade him, saying, I have need to be baptized
 “ of thee, and comest thou to me? And *Jesus*
 “ answering, said unto him, suffer it to be so
 “ now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all
 “ righteousness. Then he suffered him. And
 “ *Jesus*, when he was baptized, went up straight-
 “ way out of the water; and lo! the heavens
 “ were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit
 “ of God descending like a dove, and lighting
 “ upon him. And lo! a voice from heaven,
 “ saying, this is my beloved Son, in whom I am
 “ well pleased *.”

* Matthew iii. 13—17.

It will readily be acknowledged, that if John and Jesus were joint deceivers, Jesus's coming to desire baptism of John, must have been an artifice first privately concerted between them. It is plainly incredible, that *Jesus* should apply publicly to his *Forerunner*, on so particular an account; unless they had previously agreed upon this step, for the sake of some advantages, which they hoped to derive from it. So that, upon the supposition of any imposture, *John* must in reality have approved of *Jesus's* request; and his refusal at first to baptize *Jesus*, as if it were more proper that *Jesus* should baptize *Him*, could be nothing more than a well-chosen expedient, to prevent the people from suspecting any such preconcerted agreement between them.

WHAT then could these proposed advantages be? A very little reflection upon the case will presently convince us, that *Jesus's* being baptized by *John*; considered only as to the nature of the thing itself; was a step so far from being calculated to promote the success of their supposed imposture; that, if it should have any effect at all upon the opinions of the people, it must necessarily tend to prevent it.

JOHN's baptism was plainly borrowed* from that, which the Jews made use of, in the admif-

* See note, p. 266.

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from of heathen profelytes to the profession of Judaism; and *John* made use of his, in a similar manner, for the admission of his disciples into a still purer profession. This purpose, to which *baptism* among the Jews had always been applied; together with some traditions generally received, that they should all be *baptized* and *purified*, against the coming of the *Messiah**; had naturally contributed to make the Jews conceive a very high opinion of the dignity and holiness of any prophet, who was commissioned to *baptize*; and consequently to conclude, that there could not be so great a degree of purity and holiness in those, who themselves stood in need of *being baptized* by him. This opinion must likewise have prevailed, particularly with regard to all who should come to be baptized of *John*; as *his* was professedly no other than the "baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins;" and of which therefore, those only who had actually sinned could be thought to stand in need.

y. "The Jews, it seems, had conceived an opinion that they were all to be *baptized*; either by the *Messiah* himself, or some of his retinue; because it is said, Zach. xiii. 1. "In that day, there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness." Macknight's Comm. sect. 18. Not. on John i. 25. See Lightfoot on the place, II. 522.

WHAT comparison then must it necessarily have been expected the people would make, between the *characters* of *John* and *Jesus*; when they beheld *Jesus* become a suppliant for *baptism* to *John*? Was this a step calculated to prevent that fatal mistake, which the people had already shewn themselves inclined to run into; that of regarding *John* instead of *Jesus* as the *true Messiah*? How could impostors expect the people to reconcile the seeming superiority of *John* over *Jesus*, in point of holiness and purity; which to them would appear so plain, by *Jesus's* submitting to be baptized by *John*; with *John's* own declaration, so lately made to them, that He was not worthy to do even the most menial offices about the person of *Jesus*.

COULD He, who was unworthy even to undo the latchet of *Jesus's* shoes, be a person of so superior a character, as to make *Jesus* desirous of being baptized by him? Which of these public declarations were the people to believe; or rather how could they give any credit to *Him*, who was the author of both? Above all, how could They themselves think it would prove a more easy task, to make the people believe, that *Jesus* was the *true Messiah*? should they give them reason to think, that he stood in need of baptism from

One,

One, who professedly baptized into "repentance, for the remission of sins?"

"JOHN's hesitating*, at first, to comply with *Jesus's* request, could make no alteration in the request itself; nor remove so considerable a stumbling-block out of their way. Nor was any other consequence to be expected from this contrivance, but that it would distract the opinions of the people *very much* about them; and induce many, from this time, to conceive but an inferior notion of *Jesus's* character; and entertain the strongest suspicions of the veracity of *John*.

* It may here be worth while to observe, that if *John's refusal* to baptize *Jesus* upon his first request, was purely a contrivance to prevent the Jews from suspecting any deceit; as it *must* have been if *John* and *Jesus* were *deceivers*; it should seem, at least, highly probable, that those of *Jesus's* disciples, who afterwards wrote histories of his life and actions, would not have given us accounts of *Jesus's* being baptized by *John*; without at the same time recording this *refusal* of the Baptist, at first, to comply with his desire. If this artifice seemed of moment enough to be put in practice, nothing seems more natural, than that they should all have thought proper to record it. Whereas it appears in fact, that though *every one* of the evangelists have related *Jesus's* being baptized by *John*; which is by no means the case in several of the most important transactions; yet *none* but *Matthew* has made the least mention of *John's* refusal at first to do it.

See Matthew iii. 13, 15. Mark i. 9—11. Luke iii. 21, 22. John i. 32—34.

SINCE then it must have occurred to *John* and *Jesus*; who could not be ignorant of the most prevailing opinions of the whole people, that the step now before us was of such a nature in itself, as to threaten them with the most fatal influence on their credit, instead of contributing at all to its support; was there any external reason, which might promise so much benefit to their design, as to induce them, notwithstanding, to adopt it?

A tradition of the scribes, we are told*, prevailed universally, at this time; that *Elias* was not only to appear as the *Messiah's* *Forerunner*, and to preach concerning him; but also, that he was to baptize *Him*, in person, and make him known to the people. Perhaps then they might think, that the prevalence of this tradition laid them under a necessity of conforming to it; and that great credit would accrue to them from exactly fulfilling it. But plausible as this objection may at first appear; their own conduct will sufficiently prove it to be utterly groundless and false.

HAD *John's* baptizing *Jesus* been a step concerted between them with such a design; they would unquestionably have made *this* use of it, in support of their particular pretensions, when any fair opportunity occurred. In particular, when

* See Whitby on Matthew xi. 14.

ever they thought proper to appeal to *this tradition* at all; which, but for the sake of some such tradition as that just mentioned, they could never have agreed on; the fulfilling of *that tradition* most certainly have been the chief point, of which they would have reminded the Jews. If they judged the fulfilling of this tradition so necessary to the success of their plot; as, on this account, to do, what might otherwise have been attended with the most prejudicial effects to their cause; it must be absurd to suppose, they could neglect making that use of it, for which *alone* it was designed, when it had been actually accomplished.

YET is there nothing more certain, than that they must have done so; since, throughout all the Gospels, there is not the least hint to be met with, either of *this tradition itself*, or of its *accomplishment* on this occasion.

VERY soon after *Jesus* had been thus baptized, we find *John* publicly bearing witness to the truth of his divine pretensions. "This is he, of whom * I spake, he that cometh after me, is preferred before me*, &c." Again, he gives the same testimony to the deputation of Pharisees, whom the rulers sent purposely to enquire of him †, who

* John i. 19—22.

† Idem i. 19—23.

he himself was? But on neither of these remarkable occasions does he give them the least hint of his having *fulfilled* any such tradition; to strengthen the authority of his own declarations. And though, in answer to their farther enquiry; "why he baptized then, since he was neither the Christ, nor Elias, nor that prophet?" John took occasion to tell them, that there stood one among them, who was so highly preferred before him; yet did he make no mention at all of his having *baptized* Jesus; and much less allege this transaction, as the accomplishment of any received tradition, concerning the *true Messiah*, and his expected *Forerunner*.

NAY, when he once actually reminded the people of the transaction *itself**; not a word did he utter, concerning any tradition; which by this means had been fulfilled. Jesus, *himself* likewise, when, a long time after this, he put † the Jews in mind of the witness which John had borne to him, was as silent, with regard to the accomplishment of this tradition, as John had been, before him. And even the evangelists; whose frequent custom it is to inform us, that such particular things came to pass, in order, that certain prophecies might be fulfilled; have neither of them

* John i. 31—34.

† John v. 32—38.

made mention of any tradition as having been accomplished by this event.

From the nature of this transaction, then, we must freely confess, that *John* and *Jesus* could not be deceivers: because otherwise we must maintain, that they agreed upon this step without any hope or intention of procuring the least benefit by it; at the same time, that they could not but expect, that it would distract and perplex the people in general about their *divine* pretensions; which it was, above all things, their interest, to make them exactly comprehend; and thus very greatly obstruct the success of their whole plot. At least there is but one possible way to avoid this conclusion. And that is by supposing, that the astonishing voice and appearance, which was observed immediately after *Jesus* was baptized, was nothing more than the effect of *Their* exquisite skill and cunning: and that the whole affair was agreed on, merely for the sake of establishing their credit, by *this* wonderful contrivance. And indeed, could it be believed, that what happened on this occasion, might possibly be the effect of human contrivance; no more were to be said. *John* might well baptize *Jesus*; in order to have an opportunity of imposing upon the people, with so marvellous a deceit, if they could perform it;

how and how * how-

however prejudicial to their credit, such a step might have been, without it.

BUT that this could not possibly be, is evident both from the conduct of *Jesus*, and the nature of the thing.

HAD They contrived and executed so exquisite a deception; *Jesus* would certainly never after have appealed to *John's* testimony in his favour, without making particular mention of this *miraculous* appearance, at the time, when he was *baptized*. He could not have reminded the Jews of *John's* answer to the Pharisees; "ye sent unto *JOHN*, and he bare witness of me *;" without appealing at the same time to the fact before us; so much more convincing, than every thing else, that *John* had ever witnessed in his favour. He could not have gone on appealing to his own *works*, because "they were † greater witnesses than that of *JOHN*;" without at the same time appealing to this *miraculous* appearance likewise; which had been so successfully brought about, at the time when *John* had baptized him.

As for the *nature* of the thing, we need only repeat what actually came to pass to determine upon it. "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that *Jesus* being also

* John v. 33.

† John v. 36.

" bap-

“baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened;
 “and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape,
 “like a dove, upon him. And a voice came from
 “heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved son, in
 “thee I am well pleased *.” It would be idle to
 go about to demonstrate, that if *John* and *Jesus* were
 impostors, they could *not* have had the whole system
 of nature at their disposal; could *not* have caused
 the sky to open before a multitude, and something
 visible to descend from it; which, after lighting
 gently on the head of *Jesus*, remained † upon him;
 could *not* have caused a multitude to hear an articu-
 late voice, coming as from heaven upon them.
 These were effects evidently beyond the reach of
 human contrivance, such as the most artful deceivers
 could never entertain the least thought of accom-
 plishing.

Nor to insist therefore on the evidence, which
 the *miracle itself* affords; a consideration entirely
 foreign to the design of this enquiry; all the con-
 clusion we would here draw from it, is, that no
 views of contriving such a marvellous appearance
 as this, could be instrumental in causing *John*
 and *Jesus* to agree, that *Jesus* should come to *John*,
 in this manner, and be *baptized*. Their own con-
 duct has likewise shewn, that they certainly did

* Luke iii. 21, 22.

† John i. 33.

not agree upon this step, in order to fulfill any tradition, that prevailed at that time. And as to the natural tendency of the transaction itself; that, we have seen, was so far from being likely to increase their credit, that they themselves must have believed, if it had any effect at all, it would fill the minds of the people with doubts and suspicions about them. So that as no reasons whatever can be produced, for their agreeing to act in this manner, consistent with the point they had in view, if they were impostors*; and, at the same time,

* After what has been suggested in this, and the preceding article, it must needs become in a very high degree improbable, that John and Jesus could be impostors; on this single account only; that *Jesus baptized as well as John*. For what else could impostors expect to follow, from *Jesus's* baptizing the people, when they had already received the baptism of *John*; and after *Jesus himself* too had been baptized by him; but that it would unavoidably make the people believe that *Jesus* himself regarded *John's baptism*, as of no value or importance; and, besides, by filling their minds with doubt and perplexity at so unusual a conduct, be a great means of preventing them from ever becoming hearty friends to their cause? Deceivers could expect nothing else, by this means, but to weaken very greatly the authority they had hitherto acquired; and at all events to obstruct the success of all their joint designs. And accordingly thus it happened. For soon after *Jesus* began to baptize the people in Judea (John iii. 22.); while *John* was doing the same at Enon, near to Salim (23.);—"There arose a question between
" some

time, many obvious and important considerations occur, which must have deterred them from it ;
it

“ some of John’s disciples, and the Jews, about purifying, (Ibid. 25.). That is, in other words, when the Jews saw *Jesus* baptizing as well as *John* ; he whom *John* had himself baptized, now taking upon him to rebaptize the disciples of *John*, and this too without any opposition from him ; unable to account for so unusual a conduct, any other way, they objected to *John*’s particular followers ; that if *Jesus* was empowered to do *this*, they must no longer pretend, that the *baptism* of their own Master was of any use or importance (See Macknight’s Comm. sect. 21.). That this would be the consequence of their *Both* baptizing, in the manner they now did, was so obvious, that it is incredible any such impostors could have agreed to do so. But, even could *this* be thought possible ; it must at least be allowed, that they would have taken care to furnish their own immediate *followers*, with such an answer to this obvious and material objection ; as might enable *Them*, at any time, to silence the scruples of the people about it. If they could not do this, they would have laid aside the design. But even this too they certainly did *not* do ; for *John*’s disciples, it appears, were unable to give an answer to the objection ; and came to their master complaining, “ Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same “ baptizeth, and all men come unto him.”—Thus remarkably does every particular in the conduct of *John* and *Jesus* contribute to prove, that they could not possibly be deceivers.

What has here been observed will likewise serve to illustrate very greatly the truth of the conclusion established in the *first* section of this Part ; from the consideration, that *John* never
at

it must be confessed, that *Jesus's* coming to *John*, and being *baptized* by him, in the manner he was, is indeed a very strong collateral proof, that they could not be deceivers.

attempted to perform any *miraculous* works. The only supposition capable of being there made, though at the same time it proved absolutely groundless, to reconcile *that* fact with the existence of an imposture, was, that *John* might refrain from working wonders, for fear of distracting the judgement of the people between *Jesus* and *Himself*. But now, when we see that *John* baptized *Jesus*, and yet *Jesus* rebaptized the disciples of *John*; a practice which it was obvious, could not fail to fill the minds of the people with doubts and perplexity about them; this fact *alone* is sufficient to convince us, it could not have been agreed between them, that *John* should deprive himself of so great an advantage, as that of working wonders, upon any such account.

SECTION V.

John's answer to the deputation from the Sanhedrim; and a particular in Jesus's conduct relative to it.

WHEN *John* had now continued to shew himself to the people, for some space of time, and very soon after his baptizing *Jesus*, in the manner we have just now seen; such an opportunity offered itself to him, of making known his divine pretensions to the very chief of the people; and preparing the way for *Jesus*, who was now beginning to appear; as, had they been joint deceivers, *John* must have been extremely desirous to obtain.

“THE Jews* sent Priests and Levites from “Jerusalem;” to Bethabara beyond Jordan, where *John* was then baptizing; “to ask him, “who art thou?” and it will be well worth our while to observe how he conducted himself upon this critical occasion. “And he confessed, and “denied not, but confessed I am not the Christ. “And they asked him, what then? Art thou

* John i. 19—25.

“ Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that
 “ Prophet? and he answered, no. Then said they
 “ unto him, who art thou? that we may give an
 “ answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou
 “ of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one cry-
 “ ing in the wilderness, make straight the way of
 “ the Lord; as said the prophet Esaias. And they,
 “ which were sent, were of the Pharisees. And
 “ they asked him, and said unto him; why bap-
 “ tizest thou then; if thou be not that Christ,
 “ nor Elias, neither that Prophet? John answered
 “ them, saying; I baptize with water: but there
 “ standeth One among you, whom ye know not;
 “ he it is, who, coming after me, is preferred be-
 “ fore me; whose shoes latchet I am not worthy to
 “ unloose.”

WHEN it is considered, *who* those persons were,
 with whom we find *John*, on this occasion engaged;
 it will readily be seen, in what manner an impostor,
 in his circumstances, must have behaved. Instead
 of being casually applied to by some of the multi-
 tude; he was now addressed by deputies sent pur-
 posely from the *rulers* themselves: and these too
 not indiscriminately appointed, but *Priests* and
Levites; men of knowledge and skill in all sacred
 matters; and in fine, men of the most reputed and
 skilful sect, *Pharisees*. Instead of being asked for
 his instruction in an easy point of spiritual advice;
 the

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the question, to which they required an immediate and categorical answer, was no less than this; what particular divine *character* he pretended to assume?

QUESTIONED upon so important a point, by those who were best able to judge of the truth of his pretensions, and would certainly examine them with the utmost rigour; by those likewise, who were capable of being his most serviceable friends; but otherwise were sure to be his most potent and inveterate enemies; in what manner must *John*, if an impostor, have replied to their demands? To give *no* determinate answer to such an embassy, after having taken upon him to *baptize* the people, and utter prophecies; would have been betraying the cause he was embarked in, and a tacit confession of his deceit. He must therefore have declared, *what* divine character he took upon him.

HE would likewise have employed all his art and ingenuity, not in enumerating only, but in illustrating all those proofs he had been able to devise, for the foundation of his pretensions; and in urging them to the best advantage. And as he very well knew, that these deputies from the Pharisees came prepossessed against him; if he was able to allege any circumstances, likely to remove their personal prejudices, he could not have ne-

glected to throw in *these* likewise; in order to induce them to examine the proofs, on which he rested his claim to inspiration, with more candor and impartiality than he could otherwise expect. This attack was what he must have looked for, from the beginning; and therefore must have been long provided with his answer. And the opportunity it afforded him, to try what could be done with the chief *priests* and *pharisees*; if not to deceive; at least to puzzle and confound them; was what he could by no means have neglected.

THUS, had *John* been a deceiver; when he received this embassy from the *rulers*, his first care would naturally have been, to turn the sacred profession of the messengers themselves, as well as those who sent them, to his own advantage; by making them conceive of *Himself* with more respect than before. To this end he would have reminded them, that He too was by birthright a priest of the God of Israel, as well as themselves; and the son, of no less honourable a priest, than *Zacharias*; who must yet have been well remembered among them; and who had lived and died with the reputation of unblemished virtue and integrity.

THEN he would have recounted to them at large, all those astonishing events that had happened to his *Parents*: or at least were by many
be-

believed to have happened to them; from *Zacharias's* loss of speech in the temple, to his recovery of it again, at the time of his own circumcision. And he would have referred them to the neighbourhood where *Zacharias* had lived, and where all these things had been noised abroad at the very time, for a full confirmation of the truth of all he advanced. Above all, he would certainly have given them a very particular account, both of the *Angel's*, and his *Father's* prophecy, concerning *Himself*; as these predictions were the sole foundation of whatever he might pretend to; and very minutely pointed out *that* particular character, in which he now appeared. †

SUCH would certainly have been the answer of *John* to the Priests and Levites, had he been a deceiver. But *John*, it appears, adopted quite a *contrary* part. He declined making use of even those fair and obvious means in his power, to remove, or at least lessen, their prejudices against him. He chose to *suppress*; for on *this* occasion it was impossible for him to *forget*; all those marvellous events, which were believed to have accompanied his conception and birth; and which, if he was a deceiver, must have been the *only*, and long-laid foundation of all his present attempts. Nay, he not only refused to allege *Zacharias's*, and the *Angel's* prophecies in his own behalf; but

even answered the messengers in such a manner as he knew might be interpreted by the pharisees, and indeed by any one, to be contradictory to them.

THE angel, it had been publicly affirmed, had foretold to *Zacharias*, "that * John should go before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elias." But when the messengers put the question to *John* himself, "Art thou Elias?" What answer did *John* give? He said, "I am not."

Now it is true indeed the Jews in general expected, that *Elias* † the *Tishbite*, himself; he, who had been so distinguished a prophet among them, above eight hundred years before; was to be the identical person, who would appear again to usher in the *Messiah*. And consequently, as the messengers, by their question, meant to ask *John*, whether he was "that very Elias;" *John*, since he knew their meaning, might very truly declare, "he was not." But for this very reason, since the Jews in general expected *Elias himself* to come again; and not any other person, in a character similar to his; it was plain, that all who had ever heard of the revelations given out at *John's* birth, might have understood them as spoken immediately

* Luke i. 17.

† See Whitby on Matthew xi. 14. Lightfoot, II. 522, 183, 209; and I. 522. Pocock on Micah iv. 5.

of *Elias* himself; and, consequently, might consider *John's* answer, upon this occasion, as directly contradictory to them. And even such as never heard of the Angel's prophecy to *Zacharias*, might probably consider this answer as a plain declaration from *John* himself, that the office of *Elias* belonged not to *Him*. Nor was it possible for *John* himself to have been ignorant of this, or not aware of it.

CAN it then be conceived, that an impostor, laying claim to *this* very character and office; would have given an embassy of the pharisees such an answer as this, to an enquiry which struck directly at the very foundation of all his claims? Or could the *same* deceiver, who must have been so extremely desirous to be like *Elias*, in his whole appearance and conduct, as even to imitate him in the particularity of his dress* itself; could He send the priests back with such an answer to the rulers, as he well knew would appear to *them*, to be an utter disclaiming of all connection with the character and office of *Elias*?

It was the established opinion, that *Elias* must first come. If therefore *John* was only a deceiver, his intention must have been, either to pass for *that very Elias*, whom the whole nation through

* See note, p. 254.

mistake expected; or he must have designed to convince the Jews, that *they* misunderstood the prophecies concerning *Elias*; and that *He* himself, though not *that very Elias*, whom they expected, and asked him after; was in fact the *very person foretold* under his name. Any pretender to the character of *Elias* was under an absolute necessity of adopting one, or the other, of these plans.

If he plainly denied himself to be the person, whom they all expected; and at the same time made use of no endeavours to convince them, that they expected a person, who really was *not* to appear; it is evident he did not try to procure himself the least chance for success. The only consequence of this conduct could be no other than this; that his present pretensions, as well as all that had been before published about him, would be regarded as the effect of artifice and imposture.

His seeming to them to deny himself to be *either* of those persons, whom the Jews expected to appear, before the coming of the *Messiah* himself; joined to his giving them a very short account of what he really pretended to be; could not but contribute very greatly to prevent both the rulers and the people from believing in him, as the *Messiah's Forerunner*; and consequently, totally prevent *his* testimony from inducing them
to

to receive *Jesus* in the character of the *Messiah* himself.

VIEW the thing in whatever light we can; is it not utterly incredible; that a counterfeit of the *Messiah's Forerunner* should not profit himself of the universal persuasion; by pretending to be *that very Elias*, whom the whole Jewish people was already disposed to acknowledge and believe? That he should refuse to apply so important a prepossession to the furtherance of his own imposture, which was absolutely grounded upon it, is on all considerations clearly incredible; but certainly, not to conform in this point, to the universal belief and expectation; and yet, at the same time, to use no means whatever to remove it; would have been a conduct so apparently absurd in an impostor, as, we cannot hesitate to pronounce, no impostor could pursue*.

How-

* At the same time it is certain, that *John's* denying himself to be *Elias*, on this occasion, is perfectly consistent with his true character, if he was really the *divine* Forerunner of the *Messiah*. "That the *Baptist*, on being asked if he was *Elias*, should have answered in the negative, needs not to be thought strange; if the persons, who put the question to him, believed, that *Elias*, the *Tishbite*, was coming personally from heaven to usher in the *Messiah*. For though the name of *Elias* did truly belong to *John*; Malachi having called him thereby; he was not the person whom the people expected, and the priests meant,

HOWEVER, for a moment let us neglect this consideration, and turn to a particular in the conduct of *Jesus*, which relates immediately to this of *John*.

WHATEVER character *John* publicly assumed, or denied; this at least is certain, that if *Jesus* and *He* were joint deceivers; and we have seen long ago, that they must have been confederates, or no impostors at all; *Jesus* could never speak of *John's* peculiar divine character, in such a manner, as he knew would, in all probability, be interpreted, as directly *contradictory* to what *John* had

meant, when they asked him, *art thou Elias?*" Macnight's Comm. sect. 18. note.

" His meaning therefore is only this: I am not *that Elias* in person, whom you expect; nor am I such a prophet as, in the days of the Messiah, you expect to rise from the dead." Whitby on Matthew xi. 14. from Pocock, vol. I. p. 198. It is plain therefore, that if *John* had answered, he *was Elias*; he must likewise have taken pains to shew the priests, that they were mistaken in their notions of *that Elias*, who was to come. But to attempt convincing the Sanhedrim, that *they* were mistaken in the notions of *that* prophet, whom they sent to ask him, whether *He* was; was what the *true* Forerunner of the Messiah, might well know would be fruitless and vain. He therefore referred this deputation of the priests, and through them the whole Sanhedrim, from whom they came, to *Isaiah*, for a true account of *his Office*; and left them to the honest use of those lights they were possessed of, to determine *who* he was.

said

said of himself. *John's* denying himself to be *Elias* in the manner he did, was a particular of such consequence, as he could not have determined to put in practice, without *Jesus's* knowledge and consent. When therefore *John* had declared, that he was *not Elias*; had they been impostors, *Jesus* could not afterwards have affirmed, that he *was*. Yet *this*, it appears, *Jesus* actually did.

JOHN, as we have just seen, declared to the priests, without any particular explanation of his meaning, that he was not *Elias*: and adding only, that he was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, as said the prophet *Esaias*; left them to determine farther about him, by themselves. But some time after this, upon occasion of *Jesus's* receiving from him a very remarkable message, by two of his disciples; *Jesus* took the opportunity to descant very minutely upon the real character of *John*. And after having affirmed, "that among
" all, who were born of women, there had not
" arisen a greater prophet than *John* the Baptist;" he closed his remarkable account of him, with this most emphatical declaration: "And, if ye
" will receive it, this is ELIAS WHICH WAS FOR
" TO COME. He that hath ears to hear, let him
" hear *."

* Matthew xi. 14, 15.

NOTHING

Nothing could be more emphatical, than this declaration; nor, according to the notion, which the people entertained of *Elias*, could any assertion seem more contradictory, to what *John* had said of himself. True indeed it is, that *John* was not *that Elias*, about whom he was questioned; and equally true, that he was *that Elias who was for to come*. So that there was no real inconsistency between what *Jesus* said of *John*, and what He had before said of *himself*. But to the people, *John* and *Jesus* were well apprized, that in this there must appear a plain contradiction, so long as they retained their present opinion of *Elias*. Nor could they therefore, if impostors, have asserted any thing of so much consequence, in terms, which they knew, might be thought contradictory to each other; without at the same time using such arguments, as they must have prepared for this very purpose, to convince the Jews, that they had taken up a false opinion of *that Elias*, who was indeed to come before the arrival of the *Messiah*.

For what could they expect the people to think, if they should think at all upon the matter, concerning two pretenders to divine inspiration and authority; who seemed to them plainly to contradict each other; and this too, in a point of no less importance, than the very nature of that pro-

prophetical character, which One of them assumed ; and upon the reality of which, his evidence, in favour of the other, depended ? However this seeming contradiction did, in fact, pass unobserved ; in the nature of the thing itself, it was very highly improbable, that both priests and people should all overlook it. Nor can any supposition be much more incredible than this ; that two the most subtil pretenders to divine inspiration, should deliberately resolve to run the hazard of such a seeming *material contradiction* ; and, for no end whatever, furnish every one with so striking an argument for rejecting them, as convicted impostors.

IN short, *John*, who replied to the embassy of the priests in such a manner, as he knew, would appear to them to be a refusal of any of those characters, in some one of which, he likewise knew, the whole nation expected the *Messiah's Forerunner* to appear ; and yet did not so much as intimate to them, that they themselves had formed any erroneous expectations about him ; could not be the crafty associate of a counterfeit *Messiah*. Nor could *Jesus*, who expressly attributed such a title to *John*, as he knew might appear a plain contradiction to the testimony, that *John* had already given of himself ; be a *pretended Messiah*, acting in concert with *John* ; who was to prepare his way
before

before him, by assuming the part of his *Forerunner* *.

* Besides what has been said to shew, that if *John* and *Jesus* had been impostors, the *One* could not have refused the character of *Elias*, nor the *Other* have afterwards attributed it to him; without at the same time entering into a particular explanation of the exact character, which they meant by *that* name; it is well worth our notice, that *Jesus's* manner of speaking, on this occasion; "*if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come;*" plainly shews, that he thought the people would not believe *John* was the true *Elias*; and yet at the same time we find, that he took no pains to convince them that he really was. What could be more opposite than this to the necessary conduct of an impostor?

SECTION VI.

A very peculiar character and office ascribed to Jesus by John.

SO incontestable does the divine inspiration of *John* and *Jesus* appear, that there is scarce a word or action recorded of the *Former*; which, upon a closer inspection, will not furnish us with some strong collateral proof of the integrity of *Both*; by multiplying the absurdities, that must follow, from supposing them to have been impostors.

THE *next* day; after the priests and levites had been sent by the Sanhedrim, to enquire of *John*, who he was; “*John* seeth *Jesus* coming unto him, and saith; behold the LAMB of God, which taketh away the sins of the world*.” And again, the next day after, *John* stood, and “two of his disciples; and looking upon *Jesus*, as he walked, he saith, behold the LAMB of God†.”

Now had *John* and *Jesus* been deceivers, it is evident, that all such remarkable declarations of

* *John* i. 29.

† *Ibid.* 35, 36.

Either,

Either, concerning the peculiar divine character and office of the *Other*, must have been first secretly agreed on between them; with a view of promoting their reception, in those particular characters, which they thought fit to ascribe, in this manner, to *Each Other*. And this observation is the more particularly applicable to the instance before us; because the *very peculiar* character here given to *Jesus*, by his associate, made no part of any of *those* divine revelations, which were given out, as having preceded, and accompanied his *birth*. So that, as none of *those* prophecies were at all concerned in the case, which they might think themselves under a necessity to fulfill; it must have been *merely* the benefits they expected, to arise, from publicly giving *Jesus* this very *remarkable* appellation, that could induce them to agree to do it.

Is it possible then, that *John's* unexpected and repeated declaration of this *new* part of *Jesus's* character, now before us, could be agreed on between them, from the hopes of any advantages to be derived from it? Could it be thought capable of inclining the Jews to receive *Jesus* the more readily for the *true Messiah*? The character here ascribed to *Jesus*, that of "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world;" evidently and directly alluded to the

the daily *sacrifices* offered up in the temple at Jerusalem, for the whole people ; as well as the rest of the *sin-offerings* appointed in the Jewish law *. In all which the *death of the victim* was represented as the *means*, by which the *sin* of those, for whom it was offered, *was taken away* : for, in the Jewish law, *without shedding of blood there was no remission* †.

If therefore any notice should be taken of *this* remarkable character ascribed by the *Baptist* to *Jesus* ; which, from its novelty, it was highly probable there would ; as *John's* repetition of it plainly shewed, he was very desirous there might ; it was impossible, for the Jews to put *any other* interpretation upon it, than *this* ; that *Jesus* was one day to be publicly *put to death*, as an atonement for the sins of all.

BUT was *this* such an account of the design of *Jesus's* coming into the world, as an impostor could imagine, would make the Jews more ready to receive him, for their long-promised *Messiah* ? Or even, was *this* such a *catastrophe*, as would correspond with the received interpretation of those prophecies, that had been given out concerning *Jesus*, at the time of his birth ? In particular,

* See Lightfoot and Whitby on the place. Lewis's Heb. Antiq. b. iv. ch. 4 and 6,

† Epistle to the Hebrews, ix. 22.

could *Jesus* imagine, that the Jews would consider this as an accomplishment of *that* prediction ; that he should free them from all their enemies, and sit on the throne of his father *David* ? The contrary is too notorious to admit of question.

How then was it possible, that the *false Fore-runner* of a *pretended Messiah*, could set himself to inculcate into the people, *such* an opinion concerning his Associate's real character and designs, as was *alone* sufficient, should they believe it, to make them immediately *reject* him ? Or what could be more opposite to every conceivable design, an impostor could entertain ; and consequently, what more impossible for an impostor to do ; than to take pains to make the people believe, that the very motive and design of all his actions was, *to procure himself to be put to death* ? This surely, if any thing could be so, must have been impossible : and therefore, neither *John*, who ascribed *this* character and office to *Jesus* ; nor *Jesus*, whose reception and success it so immediately concerned, could possibly be a deceiver.

SECTION VII.

A remarkable particular in John's conduct to Herod, considered in its relation to Jesus.

THE evangelists have not expressly informed us, how long *John* continued preaching in public and baptizing the people. But thus much is certain, that the purity of his doctrine, and the sanctity of his life, had procured him the highest esteem and veneration; as well with *Herod* himself, as the whole people; while he was still publicly conversant with them.

WHAT opinion *Herod* had of his integrity, and how great an influence *John* had over him, we learn from the evangelist *Mark*; who has not scrupled to assert, "that Herod feared John, " knowing that he was a just man, and an holy; " and observed him; and when he heard him, he " did many things, and heard him gladly *." No stronger proof can be desired, of that great veneration which *Herod* had conceived for him,

* Mark vi. 20.

than his being pleased with, and listening to, the advice of One in a station of life so very far below him, as the *Baptist*.

AND how universal his authority was with the people, is evident from the conduct of the priests; who, some time after his death, were afraid the people would have stoned them, should they venture to say he was an impostor*. *Josephus* likewise makes honourable mention† of him, as one who taught the people the necessity of virtue and true holiness; and adds, that his influence over them was so great, that *Herod* himself was fearful of him, lest he should excite a revolt; and therefore confined him,

POSSESSED of such credit both with the prince and the people, what conduct would the secret Associate of a pretended Messiah, at this time, have pursued? *Jesus*, who assumed the character of the *Messiah himself*, had not appeared so long on the public stage; his credit remained yet to be established; and upon his success, at last, must the event of their joint undertaking unavoidably depend. The crafty *Forerunner* therefore would now, more than ever, have employed all his art, to keep that influence he had already acquired; at once, cunningly instilling into the people such

* Luke xx. 6.

† See note, p. 28, 29.

notions as were best calculated to serve his secret designs; and practising every artifice upon *Herod* to preserve his protection and kindness uninterrupted. The more popular he was, the more cautious he would certainly have been of incurring *Herod's* jealousy, or displeasure; for fear of blasting at once all their preconcerted designs, when they were, at length, in so fair a way for success.

BUT how opposite to all this, was the conduct of *John the Baptist*. At this critical point of time, in this peculiar situation; when both *his own*, and his *Confederate's* interest absolutely required him to act in the manner just described; he even proceeded to reprove *Herod himself*, for the wickedness of his life; and charged him with the unlawfulness of his most darling pleasures, in so particular an instance; his marriage with *Herodias**, his brother *Philip's* wife; that he could expect nothing less in return, from *Herod's* violence of temper, and *Herodias's* influence, than imprisonment and death. And accordingly we find, that *Herod* immediately imprisoned *John*, on account of *Herodias*; as well as, according to *Josephus*, for fear he might attempt to bring on a revolt: and *Herodias*, as it was natural to expect she would, soon after accomplished his death.

* Mark vi. 17, 18, 19.

AN impostor, in *John's* particular situation, could not but have reflected, at the first thought of so dangerous a step, as that which occasioned *John's* death; that it was not his own immediate assistance *only*, of which his *Associate* would be deprived, by *his* distraction; though this alone would have been sufficient to prevent him from adopting it. But he would besides have considered, that his own imprisonment and death, would probably strike such a panic into the people; however zealous they had before been in his favour; as would restrain them from listening afterwards to *Jesus*; or paying the same regard, they might otherwise have done, to *his* pretensions.

NAY nothing was more probable, than that *John's* public ministry being put to so ignominious an end; would even destroy that good opinion of *John* himself, which they had hitherto entertained; and induce them to believe that, notwithstanding his fair outside, he could be no better than an impostor. For by what arguments could *John* think it was possible, that the Jews could persuade themselves, he was really sent to be the *divine Forerunner* of this *triumphant Messiah*; when they should have seen him seized, by *Herod's* order, imprisoned, and put to death?

BESIDE

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BESIDE therefore *John's* regard to *his own* success, his liberty, and even his life itself; which no impostor can be thought desirous of exposing to certain destruction, for no reason; his *connection* with *Jesus*, if they were deceivers, and the necessary dependance of *Both* upon the mutual success and assistance of *Each Other*; must unquestionably have restrained *John* from provoking, at this time, the inveterate hatred of *Herodias*; and drawing on himself *Herod's* violent suspicion and displeasure. So that the remarkable behaviour of *John*, in this important particular, and at so critical a conjuncture*, affords us one of the strongest

* Here we cannot but take notice of a very remarkable particular in *Jesus's* conduct, which is closely connected with what has just been considered in *John's*. No sooner was *Jesus* informed, that *Herod* had thrown *John* into prison; than He quitted *Judea*, and went into *Galilee*. (See Matthew iv. 12. to the end; and Mark i. 14. to the end;) and traversing it all over; as well that part of it, which was under *Herod's* jurisdiction, as that under *Philip's* (Matthew iv. 23. Mark i. 39.); he there began first to preach continually to the people; elected several of his disciples to accompany him wherever he went: performed the most astonishing works; and drew the attention of the whole country upon him. But had *Jesus* and the *Baptist* been associate impostors, nothing seems more improbable, than that *Jesus* should single out *this* particular time; and the dominions of *that* particular prince, who had just then imprisoned his partner in the same wicked imposture;

strongest presumptive proofs imaginable, that neither *He* nor *Jesus* could possibly be deceivers.

posture; in order *there first* to make trial of all his devices; procure more associates; and, attended by them, to draw the multitude about with him, from all parts of the country. In an impostor, this would have been voluntarily seeking the same fate, that his Forerunner had but just experienced; and in reality provoking *Herod* to put an end, at once, to all their joint machinations. But this is what no impostor whatever can be supposed desirous to have done.

SECTION VIII.

John's very remarkable message to Jesus considered.

NO sooner was *John* cast into prison, than *Jesus* began to preach in a more public manner than before. Very soon after this, he selected his twelve disciples, to accompany him wherever he went; and excited the attention of the whole people, by healing all diseases, and even raising the dead to life.

WHEN behold, after some time spent in these employments, he was addressed before all the people, by a deputation from *John*. For "the
" disciples of *John* shewed him all these things;
" having access to him, where he was still confined. And *John* calling unto him two of his
" disciples, sent them unto him, saying; art
" Thou he that should come, or look we for
" another? When the men were come unto him,
" they said, *John Baptist* hath sent us to thee,
" saying, art thou he that could come, or look
" we for another? And in that same hour He
" cured many of their infirmities and plagues,
" and of evil spirits, and unto many that were
" blind

“ blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said
 “ unto them ; go your way, and tell John, what
 “ things ye have seen and heard : how that the
 “ blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed,
 “ the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor
 “ the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, who-
 “ soever shall not be offended in me *.

HERE we must again recollect, that if *John* and *Jesus* were impostors, *Neither* of them could take any public step, that might at all affect the credit of the *Other*, unless it had been before agreed on between them. Nor could they even agree to put in practice any contrivance of this nature, but such as they thought would serve to impose upon the people more effectually, and establish their credit more firmly than before.

HERE therefore the question immediately presents itself ; whether, if *John* and *Jesus* had been deceivers, this most *extraordinary* message from the *Baptist* to *Jesus*, could possibly be agreed on between them, from any hopes of its promoting the authority of *Either* ? If, on the contrary, the obvious, natural, and only possible effect of it must have been, exciting the people to call in question the veracity of *Both* ; this unexpected *message* will furnish us with another convincing ar-

* Luke vii. 18—23,

gument of the truth of *Jesus's* divine character, as well as that of his *Forerunner*.

COULD it then be the reputation of *Jesus*, which they were in hopes of advancing, by means of this public deputation from *John*? Nothing can be more certain, than that the only probable effect of this contrivance; should it have any effect at all; must have been, to undermine, instead of establishing and encreasing, whatever degree of credit *Jesus* had yet been able to acquire. *John*, we know, was at this time, in possession of an established and universal authority. Though the people had not agreed upon any particular divine character to ascribe to him; all were thoroughly convinced that his character was *really* divine; all believed him to be a prophet; and held him in the highest esteem and veneration.

Thus persuaded of *John's* divine character, as both *Jesus* and he well knew the people were; what influence must They themselves expect it would have upon the general opinion of *Jesus*, should the people find *John* sending his own disciples purposely to declare, as it were, in public, that *John himself* was not satisfied of the truth of *Jesus's* divine pretensions! It is obvious that, as far as *John's* authority could influence the opinion of the people, this step could only serve to *prevent* any one from becoming a disciple of *Jesus*,
who

who was not so already ; and to bring his assumed character into suspicion even with those who were.

Was it possible then for this contrivance to have been agreed on, with a view to increase the credit of *John himself*? So far from it, that they must certainly have expected, it would be attended with at least as fatal an influence upon *his own* reputation, as that of *Jesus*. *John* had before publicly borne such positive and repeated testimony, to *Jesus's* divine nature, and *particular character*; that those of the dullest apprehensions might be expected to condemn him at once, for an evident and most barefaced impostor; should he now, after all, begin to profess himself, in the least, doubtful about him,

HE it was, who from the beginning had declared, that "the law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by JESUS CHRIST*." He it was, who had long before cried out, more than once; "Behold the LAMB of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. This is HE of whom I said; after me cometh a man, which is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel: therefore am I come

* John i. 17.

" bap-

“ baptizing with water. And John bare record,
 “ saying; I saw the Spirit descending from heaven
 “ like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I
 “ knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize
 “ with water, the same said unto me; upon whom
 “ thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and re-
 “ maining on him, THE SAME is HE who bap-
 “ tizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw and
 “ bare record, that THIS is the Son of God*.
 “ And he that believeth on the Son hath ever-
 “ lasting life; and he that believeth not the Son,
 “ shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth
 “ on him†.”

AFTER such peremptory and repeated declara-
 tions as these; which, if true, place *Jesus's* di-
 vine mission and character beyond doubt; but,
 if false, must have been falsehoods, which *John*,
 at the very time of declaring them, knew to be
 such; after all these declarations, what opinion
 must he now have expected the Jews would form
 of *his own* integrity; when, after all, they should
 find him publicly declaring himself unsatisfied of
 the truth of *Jesus's* pretensions? And in no other
 sense whatever could they be expected to inter-
 pret the question before us; thus publicly put
 to *Jesus*, in *John's own* name, and by *his own*

‡ John i. 29—34.

† Idem, iii. 36.

disciples.

disciples. "John Baptist hath sent us to thee, saying; art Thou he that should come, or look we for another?"

THE only conclusion the people could be expected to draw, from the strong appearance of a contradiction of so flagrant a nature; in one, who had so often pretended to pronounce *Jesus's* divine character, by actual inspiration; was evidently this: That *John himself* had hitherto deluded them by his specious pretences; and that He, and whoever was connected with him, must be an errant impostor. This was so obvious a consequence of the message before us, should it be taken notice of at all; and should it not, it could certainly do them no good; that it must have occurred to every one, and more especially to two so artful deceivers, upon the first proposal of such a step.

It is therefore utterly incredible they could agree together before hand, that *John* should send a deputation to *Jesus* with such a message as *This*. Let us invent as many secret causes as we are able, to account for it; *none* can ever make it possible to have been the contrivance of two *pretenders* to divine inspiration; after that public and remarkable testimony, which *Jesus* had already so often received from *John*. After that, the manifest
and

and direct tendency of it could be no other, than to blast effectually the reputation of *Both*.

NAY, could we even hit on any device, that might *seem* to answer the purpose, it would not be allowable to urge it: because *Jesus's* conduct, on this occasion, clearly shews, that, if he was an impostor, he himself knew of none.

HAD they themselves provided any cunning expedient for this end; *Jesus* would certainly have made use of it, immediately after he had given his answer to the message itself; to prevent the people from drawing from it the most natural conclusions, to the utter discredit both of *John* and *Himself*. No sooner would *John's* disciples have left him, to return to their master; than we should have found *Jesus* artfully preventing those suspicions, that must otherwise be expected to spring up, in the minds of many, who had heard the message delivered; by insinuating some plausible pretence, to account for *John's* sending his disciples, at this time, to make so *strange* an enquiry.

BUT *Jesus*, on the contrary, alleged nothing of this kind. And though the doubting message, which the people had heard, could have no other effect, than to make them conclude, that *John* was certainly unable to point out the *true Messiah*, should he actually appear; *Jesus* took this opportunity,

tunity, while the sound of *John's* message was scarce out of their ears, to assert, that "John was THAT "VERY messenger, who was to go before the "Messiah's face, to prepare his way before him; "and, if they would receive it, he was ELIAS "which was for to come." Adding, to close the whole with the greatest solemnity; "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear *."

WHAT conclusion now must we be forced to draw, from a conduct, on both sides, in every respect so unaccountable as this? If, indeed, *Jesus* was the *true Messiah*, and *John* his *real Fore-runner*; all this is very possible to have come to pass. *They*, who were accomplishing the eternal counsels of God, by fulfilling a variety of explicit prophecies; in such a manner; as to afford mankind the most ample proof of their divine missions; and yet so as to leave them to their own voluntary and free conviction; it is to be expected, must have conducted themselves, on several occasions, in a manner not easily to be accounted for, by beings like ourselves, utterly unable to comprehend the whole nature of such amazing dispensations.

BUT if *They* were mere *human impostors*, who could act upon no other views than those of hu-

* Matthew xi. 10, 14, 15.

man cunning only, we may be bold to assert, that *John* could not at this time have sent *such* a message to *Jesus*; nor *Jesus* have behaved *thus* to the people, upon receiving it, if he had. They themselves must have thought, that *this* would have been no less than *provoking* the people to reject them, as undoubted impostors.

HOWEVER, though this message could not be agreed on between *John* and *Jesus*, with any view to promote their joint credit, and conceal their deceit; it may be asked perhaps, might not *John* send it with a *contrary* design? *John* had now been imprisoned some time, and there appeared no prospect of his release. It may possibly be thought he began at length to be disgusted with an undertaking, which had been the means of bringing him into such a dilemma, and could afford no hopes of extricating him from it. That, in consequence of this, he had resolved to obtain what he could for himself, by betraying that plot, in which he had succeeded so ill: and sent his disciples to deliver this suspicious message to *Jesus*, before the whole multitude; in hopes of destroying *Jesus's* credit, by means of *his own* more established authority.

OR at least, it may in general be supposed, that he did it out of resentment; owing to some misunderstanding, that had arisen between them.

Y

And

And surely it is very far from impossible, it may be said, for impostors to betray themselves, by their quarrels with each other.

BUT had *John* been at length desirous to obtain his own enlargement, and what other advantages he could, by betraying so iniquitous an imposture; instead of taking such a method as *this*, to open the eyes of the people; he would certainly have discovered the whole plot, at once, to *Herod* himself; from whom every favour, he could hope for, must be immediately derived.

FROM the beginning *He* had borne witness to *Jesus*, as the true *Messiah*, in so remarkable a manner, that by what means soever *Jesus* should be convicted of imposture; *John* could not possibly escape the same condemnation. It was therefore impossible for *Him*, to be desirous of leading the people themselves to convict *Jesus*, without *his* appearing at all voluntarily concerned in betraying him; for this evident reason, that *He* could then have no merit to plead in the discovery; nor any thing to expect from it, but that condign punishment, which was due to him for his own share in the plot. Had *John* therefore been desirous of betraying *Jesus*, *Herod* himself was the only person to whom he would have applied; and to whom he would have plainly confessed the whole plan of their imposture; in hopes
of

of obtaining *his own* pardon, at least, if not some reward.

AND thus, this remarkable *message* from the *Baptist* to *Jesus*; which, because the motive, that really occasioned it, does not appear; may, at first, perhaps, be conceived as some small objection to their credit; approves itself, upon a closer inspection, in every light it can be viewed, *one of the most satisfactory*, circumstantial proofs, of the integrity and *divine* character of them *Both*, which the gospels afford. And whether we can point out those particular motives*, which actually induced the *true Elias*, to send his disciples, with *such* an enquiry, to the *true Messiah*, is an enquiry of no real importance at all; however it might gratify our curiosity to be able to solve the question. Since, in the mean time, it appears abundantly plain, that *no such* message could on any account have been sent from *John* to *Jesus*, had they in reality been no better than impostors.

* The chief causes which have been assigned, as what might probably induce the *Baptist* to send his disciples to *Jesus* with this enquiry, may be seen, in Jortin's Discourses concerning the Ch. Rel. ch. 5. on *John the Baptist*.—Macknight's Comm. to his Harmony, sect. 42.—Whitby, and Lightfoot, on Matthew xi. 3.—And Dr. Horne's Considerations on the Life and Death of St. John the Baptist, section 7.

SECTION IX.

The conduct of Jesus in consequence of his having purified the temple.

NOT long before *Jesus's* public ministry, and his life, were put an end to together, he made a solemn entry into *Jerusalem*, attended by great multitudes, and amidst the general acclamations of the people*; in so much that "all the city was moved, saying, who is this?" And going the next day into the temple, he took upon him, "to cast them out that sold and bought in the temple; and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and said unto them, It is written, my house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves†." It would have been wonderful indeed if the rulers had not taken umbrage at his presuming to do this. "And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel; the chief priests, and scribes, came

* Matthew, ch. xxi. Mark xi. Luke xxi. John xi.

† Matthew xxi. 12, 13.

" upon

“ upon him, with the elders, and spake unto him,
 “ saying; Tell us by what authority doest thou
 “ these things? Or who is he that gave thee this
 “ authority? And he answered, and said unto them,
 “ I will also ask you one thing, and answer me;
 “ and I will tell you by what authority I do these
 “ things*: The baptism of JOHN, was it from
 “ heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with
 “ themselves, saying, If we shall say from heaven,
 “ he will say, why then believed ye him not? But,
 “ and if we say, of men; all the people will stone
 “ us; for they be persuaded that John was a
 “ prophet. And they answered, that they could
 “ not tell whence it was. And Jesus said unto
 “ them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do
 “ these things †.”

THE remarkable transaction now before us will
 serve greatly to illustrate the integrity both of *John*
 and *Jesus*; by furnishing us with another strong
 argument to shew, that the various testimonies of
 the *Former*, to the divine character of the *Latter*,
 could not have arisen from any secret imposture con-
 certed between them; and consequently, that no
 such imposture could exist.

WHEN *Jesus* took upon him to prohibit all
 that trafficking in the courts of the temple, which

* Mark xi. 29, and Luke xx. 1—8.

the priests and rulers had long permitted to be carried on there; the least he could expect was, that they would soon come to enquire of him, by what authority he pretended to do this, and from whom he derived it? For this was assuming a power, which none, who were not commissioned from God himself, or authorized by *Them*, had any right to exercise. It was openly invading *their* particular province, and striking at their whole authority, even in the face of the people. Whatever then might be the chief design of *Jesus* in driving the traders out of the temple, in this authoritative method; since it was, in a manner, certain, that the Sanhedrim would at least send him a deputation to make *this* enquiry, in consequence of it; *Jesus*, if he was an impostor, must have determined what *answer* to give them, before he put his design in execution.

THE nature of the case will likewise inform us, in what *manner* an impostor in *Jesus's* situation must have determined to answer them. He had now been a long time trying to gain credit to his divine pretensions, and had at length made a kind of public entry into the city, amidst the general acclamations of the people. And with them he was now in so high esteem, that "though the chief priests, and the scribes, and the chief of the people, sought to destroy him; they could not
" find

"find what they might do; for all the PEOPLE
"were very attentive to hear him *."

BUT as the chief priests, and rulers, were a very formidable body, and all still opposed him; should he not be able to make good his claims, when publicly challenged, in *their* name, to vindicate them; he had good reason to expect, that by degrees the good will of the *people* also would be alienated from him. As, on the other hand, the more advantageously he could support his divine authority, in *this* particular encounter; the more immovably he was sure to attach the *people* in general to his interests; and the more likely to gain over even some of the *rulers* themselves, if that were possible, to favour his cause.

Thus circumstanced, *Jesus*, if an impostor, could not have wished for a more desirable event, than to have the *chief priests*, and *scribes*, and *elders*, come publicly to demand of him, by what authority he pretended to do what he had done? Nay, if he was an impostor, we may now see, that the bringing about *this* public enquiry into his divine commission, must have been the very design he had in view; in exercising that unexpected authority, which upon this occasion he assumed.

See Luke xix. 47, 48.

HAD he been a deceiver then, he would eagerly have seized this desirable opportunity, of his own immediate contriving, to have enlarged upon every circumstance that could be alleged, in support of his divine authority. He would have related particularly, all those astonishing revelations, and other wonderful circumstances, which had accompanied his conception and birth. He would have reminded them, on how many occasions the *blind* had, by *his* operation, received their *sight*; the *lame* walked; the *lepers* been *cleansed*; the *deaf* been made to *hear*; and even the *dead* themselves been *raised up*. And in particular, had he been an impostor, in *confederacy* with *John*, he would have urged to them in the hearing of the *people*; who were all zealous disciples of the *Baptist*; and whose divine authority he knew the priests could not dare to deny; those repeated and explicit testimonies; which *John* had so often borne to *his* divine character; and in which he had even positively declared him to be the *true Messiah*. And now, likewise, when he had worked up the people, by all the arguments he could allege, to the greatest fervour in his cause; had he been an impostor, he would immediately have declared himself their *Messiah* and *King*; and have commenced at last one decisive struggle, to determine the fate of the whole imposture.

WHAT

WHAT then must we be forced to conclude, with regard to the true character of *Jesus*; who even upon *this* peculiar occasion, procured by his own means; though possessed of *such testimonies*; to establish his own divine authority, as he knew the chief priests could neither invalidate, nor dispute; would not, even at *this* time, produce any of them in his own defence? How is it possible we can believe *him* to have been the deceitful confederate of the *Baptist*; who, even on so peculiar an occasion, declined all appeal to *John's* authoritative testimony; and would not avail himself of his universal credit?

BUT did he not in fact, it may be asked, expressly put the priests in mind of *John the Baptist*? And might he not intend *this* as an appeal to *John's* testimony in his favour?—True indeed it is, that *Jesus* did actually remind the priests of *John the Baptist*: but it is no less true, that he did *this* in such a manner, as to make the justness of our conclusion even still more apparent, than it could have been; had he not made the least mention of *John*.

FOR, instead of reminding them of *John*, so as to make the least use of His testimony, in *his own* defence; it is evident, he did it with *no other* design; then merely to procure himself an opportunity of making *no defence at all*.

“ I will

" I will also ask you one thing (said Jesus), and answer me ; and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of JOHN, was it from heaven, or of men ? And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

THE manner in which, we see, *Jesus* on this occasion made mention of *John*, proves to demonstration, that though he was by no means forgetful of that explicit evidence, which *John* had so frequently borne in his favour ; yet that he was determined to make no advantage of it, for the establishment of *his own* divine character ; even at that very conjuncture, when it would have been of the most signal service to him, to alledge it. Whereas, had *Jesus* been an impostor in confederacy with *John* ; instead of making use of the Baptist's name, at this time, merely in order to procure himself an opportunity to be silent ; he would certainly have insisted on *John's* testimony, with all the power of his eloquence ; to establish the people immoveably in their present favourable opinion of *his own* divine mission, and authority. And indeed, when we consider the whole of this very remarkable transaction ; the reformation in the temple, which *Jesus* took upon him to make ; together with his answer to the chief priests and rulers,

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rulers, when they came upon him to demand by what authority he pretended to do this ; it appears undeniably, from that extraordinary manner in which he chose to make mention of *John*, upon this very peculiar occasion ; that the *Baptist* and *Jesus* could *not* possibly be *associate deceivers* ; and consequently, that *Jesus* himself could be no less than the *true Messiah*, and *John* the *Baptist* than his *divine Forerunner*.

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CONCLUSION.

THE enquiry, we at first set out on, is now brought to an end; and the desired conclusion established, it is hoped, by every argument at first proposed. But the peculiar nature of the transaction considered, and the various circumstances necessary to be attended to, in order to place every material particular in its true light, and effectually clear up the point in debate; have unavoidably drawn it out to an unexpected length. It may not therefore, in the last place, be improper to take a short sketch of the whole evidence produced, in support of the important point to be proved; that, when considered at once in a collective view, every distinct part may be allowed its due influence and weight; and the certainty of the conclusion be judged of, by the joint evidence of the whole.

To shew the utter incredibility of *any such* imposture, as *that* in debate, nothing more can be absolutely requisite, than to prove one or other of the following points.

EITHER

EITHER that the plot supposed is of so *absurd a nature* in itself; that it is impossible to believe it could ever be undertaken:—Or, however, if we have not materials to prove this; that all the particular *persons* concerned, were *such*, and so *circumstanced*; that it cannot be believed possible for *Them* to have contrived, or engaged in *such* a design:—Or lastly, that the manner of *conducting* the plot supposed, certainly was, in several important particulars during its progress, such as it could not have been; had the *only* persons concerned really conspired in the prosecution of *such* an imposture.

To trace out a satisfactory proof of *Either* of these points, may in many cases, for want of information, be extremely difficult; in many absolutely impossible. But in whatever instance *either* of them *fully* can be clearly, and distinctly made out; by comparing the several circumstances of the case, with the most obvious and allowed principles of human nature; *there* our doubts *must* be at an end; and the suspicion of any imposture *must* unavoidably be given up.

When therefore the case considered proves *such*, that not *one* of these points *only*, but *all* of them can be established *together*; when it can not only be made to appear *morally impossible*, for the plot in question to have *ever* been contrived; but likewise, for *those* particular persons, who *alone* are

are concerned, to have contrived it; and moreover, equally *incredible* for Them, if they had, to have conducted it in the *manner* in which it appears, from the facts themselves, to have been conducted: when *All* these points can be made good together; then we have the completest proof the *impossibility* of the plot in question, that the *nature* of such points can be ever *capable* of admitting. And, in this case the mind cannot but acquiesce without hesitation, and rest perfectly satisfied with the conclusion.

Now by *Each* of these several kinds of proofs have we been enabled to establish the truth and certainty of all those *miraculous* events, which the evangelists have recorded of the *nativities* of *John* the *Baptist* and *Jesus Christ*.

In the first place, it was obvious, that the various astonishing circumstances, said to have accompanied the conception and birth of *John*, are in their own nature so evidently miraculous; that if they really came to pass, *His* appearance in the world, and the divine character he at length assumed, *must* have been the immediate appointment of God. With regard to these facts therefore, the only point to be proved was, that they *really* came to pass.

In order to prove this, it was plainly shewn, from a multiplicity of absurdities, which must

un-

unavoidably attend the contrary supposition; that they could neither be invented by Jesus, nor his disciples, nor any one else, *after the death of JOHN*; nor by John himself, or any of his disciples, *during his life*. That *some* of them, from their very nature alone, must assuredly have come to pass, in the manner, and at the time related; and, upon the whole, that if *any* of them did not, or if there was the least deceit in the accounts of any of them; *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* must have been the original and real managers of the plot.

THE contrivance of the plot in question being thus traced up, as high as *Them*; in order to determine, whether *They* could really be the contrivers of it or not; it was in the next place, fully shewn, that, if so, the design they must have been engaged in, could not be confined to *John only*; nor could they themselves be the *only* persons concerned in carrying it on. But, that they must at the same time have been engaged in promoting *another*, similar imposture, which related in like manner to *Jesus*; and was the counterpart of that concerning *John*. And likewise that *Joseph* and *Mary* must have been intimately connected with *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, in the *joint* prosecution of *Both*.

THE foundation of the whole farther enquiry being thus laid; the next point was to prove the
in-

credibility of the existence of these *joint* impostures, in the manner first proposed; by considering the *circumstances* and *situation* of *Each* of those persons; who, it had already been clearly seen, must have contrived, and carried them on.

THIS argument therefore was the first attended to. And after having pursued it through the several tracks, which gradually opened to our view, it brought us at length to this decisive conclusion; That the *whole* supposition of these *joint impostures* must be given up, as in every particular absolutely groundless, and false.

FOR, from an attentive consideration of the most material *circumstances* attending *Each* of the persons concerned; but more especially, the *advanced age*, *sacred⁹¹ profession*, and *exemplary character*, of *Zacharias*; together with the *youth*, and *innocence*, and *unsullied reputation*, of *Mary*; and from these particulars, considered jointly with the *progress* of the supposed plots themselves; it has been fully made appear, That neither *Any* of the *Four* persons concerned, whether *singly* or *jointly*; nor *All* of them together; could possibly be the contrivers of the impostures supposed.

It has indisputably appeared, that neither *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, on one side; nor *Joseph* and *Mary* on the other; could *separately* have planned either the *Two* joint impostures, relating to both

parties; or that *One*, more immediately relating to each.

AND moreover, that even if it were credible, that *Each side* could have invented *their own* more immediate plot; it would still, above all, remain absolutely incredible, that *Either* side could have attempted to make *associates* of the *Other*; as well as that *They* could have been prevailed on, to engage with them, if they had.

So that, as the *only* persons, at all concerned in the transactions under consideration, have plainly turned out to be *such* persons as could neither have *contrived*, nor *undertaken*, the impostures in debate; all suspicion of any deceit in the case, must from *this* argument alone fall at once to the ground; the *miraculous events* in question must be acknowledged to have come to pass, in the manner they are related; and the *characters* of Those extraordinary persons, whose births they accompanied, must be submitted to, as unquestionably *divine*.

HAVING thus, in the First Part, fully proved the incredibility of the impostures in question, from considering all the *circumstances* of the several *Parties* concerned; in the Second we proceeded to establish the same point, by another argument; of no less real strength, and, at the same time, more obvious than the former. This was an illustration of several
most

most striking *absurdities*, unavoidably contained in the internal *nature* of the supposed *impostures* themselves.

UNDER this head it very plainly appeared, that the supposition of any deceit in the case before us, would indispensably oblige us to suppose the truth of several particulars, all in the highest degree impossible to be believed.

As for instance, that an old, practised, and most subtil deceiver, could plan an imposture to be carried into execution by *one particular person only*; and even venture to feign himself *dumb*, for a long space of time, merely to prepare the way for it; not only while the *very person*, for whom it was contrived, remained yet *unborn*; but likewise before he was even *conceived*; nay, and while the contriver himself had every reason the thing could admit of, for believing, that *this person*, for whom he was contriving all this iniquity, *would never actually exist*.

THAT besides, this same veteran deceiver could do all this, for the sake of *such* a plot, *so* contrived; as, after all, he could not have the least hope of ever bringing on the stage; unless he could infallibly *foretell*, not only the *future birth*, but even the *sex* too, of a particular infant, even *before* it was *conceived*.

THAT, moreover, he could deliberately fix upon *such* a plan for his intended imposture, as obliged him publicly to *foretell*, under the pretence of being divinely inspired; that a certain infant, then *but a few days old*, would assuredly live till above the age of *twenty years*.

AND besides, that the same infant, when arrived at *that age*, would certainly appear in public, and exercise the several functions of a *most extraordinary divine character*; which, humanly speaking, it was in the highest degree *doubtful*, from the nature of the character alone, whether *He* might either be *able*, or *inclined*, to counterfeit; and the *true Owner* of which, it was likewise universally believed, would appear *in the mean time*; and effectually deprive this supposed intended counterfeit of any *opportunity* to assume his part.

FROM the consideration of these, and other not less incredible suppositions; all necessarily implied in the plots in question; the nature of the case led us next to point out some remarkable particulars, which we meet with in the course of these transactions; which plainly appeared impossible to have happened, had there really been any imposture on foot.

AND here it was soon perceived, that had the interviews of the Angel with *Zacharias*, and *Mary*, been fictions of their own contriving, to gain a favourable

yourable reception for their intended impostures; unquestionably the Angel would not have been represented, as punishing *Zacharias* in that particular manner, in which *Zacharias* pretended to have been punished by him; or indeed in any manner at all; and yet at the same time suffering *Mary* to escape, without any visible mark of his displeasure.

HERE likewise, it appeared evident beyond all contradiction, that the surprizing relations of the *Shepherds at Bethlehem*; the behaviour of *Simeon* and *Anna* in the temple; and the appearance and conduct of the *Wise Men from the East*; together with the reception they met with from *Hierod himself*; and that cruel *massacre*, which immediately ensued upon their departure; were all so many astonishing events, which could not possibly have come to pass; had *Zacharias* and the *Other Three* persons originally concerned, been engaged in a joint imposture.

For it appeared abundantly evident, from a variety of considerations; that the several persons, who were the immediate actors in all these unlooked-for events; were such Persons, as neither *Zacharias*, nor any concerned with him, could have attempted seducing, to take part with them, in carrying on their designs; and such likewise,

as could *never* have become their *associates*, if they had.

Thus the truth of all the *miraculous* circumstances recorded of the conceptions and births of *John the Baptist* and *Jesus Christ*, were fully proved; by every kind of direct argument, which the nature of the facts themselves could admit. For in them it had been shewn, that neither were the *Persons* concerned *capable* of conspiring together in the plot supposed; nor was the *plot itself* even *capable* of being contrived, and entered into; nor could *several steps*, of the utmost importance which actually took place, have been adopted, had there really existed any such *imposture*, as *That*; which must be supposed.

But to render the joint force of the whole still more irresistible; and that no argument, with which the Gospels could furnish us, to illustrate so important a point, might lie neglected; the design of the last Part has been, to examine into the behaviour of *John* and *Jesus Themselves*; in those instances, in which they *must* have had a *secret*, as well as those in which they had an *apparent* connection with *Each Other*; and which must therefore tend to illustrate still farther our former conclusion, and their *true characters* and *designs*.

AND

AND upon this enquiry into the *relative* conduct of the supposed Impostors Themselves; it has appeared very plainly, in a variety of particulars, of the utmost importance to their *cause*, to have been *such*, as it is utterly *incredible* they could have adopted; had the several astonishing events, before considered, been *fictional*; and They Themselves nothing more than *mere human impostors*.

FOR, in this Part, it incontestibly appeared, that in many, even the most remarkable particulars of their public conduct towards *Each Other*, they acted in such a manner, as, to those, who had nothing more than *human* foresight to judge by, must have appeared the readiest way to obstruct, and *overfet* their whole design; and consequently, in a manner, in which *no impostors* could possibly have determined to act.

HERE therefore it may be allowable to close the whole argument, with that most important conclusion, the establishment of which was its sole object and design.

By proving *jointly*, the truth of the pretensions of *John the Baptist*, and *Jesus Christ*, to *divine* authority and inspiration; as the very nature of the facts to be enquired into, absolutely require we should; we have effectually vindicated, by *two distinct*

distinct, though connected proofs, the truth and certainty of the *Divine Mission of Jesus*:

FOR, first, if *John the Baptist* certainly was, what it has so incontestably appeared he must have been, the *divine Forerunner* of the long-expected *Messiah*; sent purposely to prepare *his* way before him, and point *Him* out to mankind; then must *Jesus*; whom *John* frequently in the most public, and peremptory manner, pronounced to be *That Divine Personage*; unquestionably have been the *true Messiah*.

AND though, from the first entrance upon the argument, the order of the facts to be enquired into, naturally led us to ascertain first, the true character of the *Baptist*; and by this means the circumstances of *Jesus's* birth, which were equally surprizing, have been attended to in the second place only; yet These Two grand Events have proved all along so *similar* to *Each Other*, and so inseparably *connected*; that, in establishing the truth of *One*, we have necessarily confirmed the *miraculous* nature of *Both*.

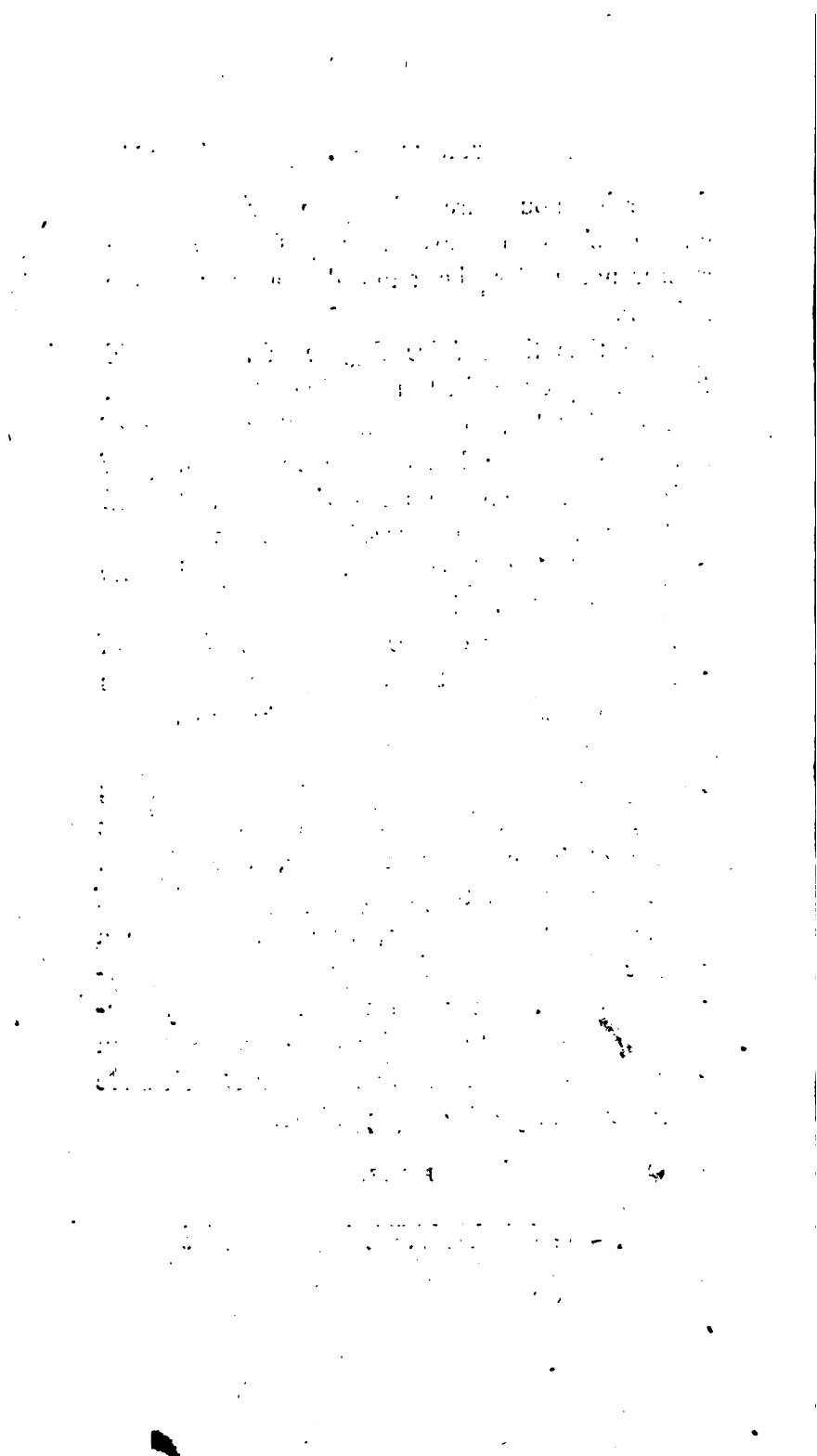
THE *same* considerations, which have so fully shewn, that no deceit can have been made use of, by *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, in order to lay a foundation for the divine pretensions of *John*; have proved likewise, at the same time, that *Joseph* and *Mary* could not possibly forge any of those

those miraculous circumstances recorded of the birth of *Jesus*; to pave the way for *His* future appearance under the assumed character of the *Messiah*.

AND thus the *Divine Mission* of *Jesus Christ* stands firmly established; not only on the adequate, and indisputable, because *inspired*, testimony of *John the Baptist*; but likewise, independantly of *His* witness, upon the unquestionable truth and certainty of all those *miraculous events* which the evangelists have truly informed us accompanied *His* own first appearance in the world.

So conspicuously do the divine dispensations of perfect wisdom and truth, distinguish themselves from the short-sighted schemes of human artifice and deceit. Plots of human cunning often appear specious at first sight, and well connected together; but, on a nearer inspection, soon betray evident tokens of inconsistency, falsehood, and disguise. While, on the contrary, the stupendous plans of divine providence, appear, at a distance, like a number of unconnected, and perhaps even interfering events; but, when most scrupulously examined, never fail to manifest the supreme wisdom of their all-perfect Author; in that irresistible force of evidence they *all jointly* produce.

FINIS.



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